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“I GOT YOU BABE” a novel by Derrick Goodwin.

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Chapter one.

I was drawing before I was six, mostly comic books starring a war correspondent called Betsy. As I grew older, my characters got more sophisticated, like Fantastic Jennie, girl of the future, and Janice Makepeace, determined private eye. I even tried painting with coloured crayon. But my dad was a working man - he made stockings on a big black machine called a power frame in a surgical supplies factory, he said he couldn't afford to have any of his children dillydallying around with art.

This will not be a typical Northern story, there are no Cricket bats in the hallway, or Yorkshire pudding in the oven, and I never met J.B. Priestley, or Freddie Trueman. But I did meet - Brian Trewin, a Southerner. He worked up here in York - for a firm of stockbrokers. He was a good looking young man, but there was about Brian the look of a man who needed finishing. He was a very boring, but kindly man.....so not being spoilt for choice - my parents encouraged me to marry him. I'd met him in a pub that was later to burn down. We had our first snack together in a cafe that was gutted by a rampaging ten-ton lorry two weeks later. We spent our first date at a folk-club that caught fire the morning after. Now to some of you, this might have meant that the romance was hot. To me - it meant that the relationship was doomed from the start.

Like Holden Caulfield - in that book by Salinger, I'd wanted a red baseball cap since I was twelve years old. I was

twenty-one, before I managed to acquire one - It came from a pen-friend in America. I also wanted to be like Marlon - burly - surly - and snarling - in a Torn T-Shirt.

'Heavens girl' my Dad said. "You can't be like that Marlon Brando chap - you're a girl'

I'd known that since I was seven, when I found out how strapless gowns were held-up.

'And don't wear that red cap in the house, they don't play baseball in Yorkshire - it's not Christian, you look like a member of the young Communist League in it'. This was my father. Who always stated the obvious.

This was back in 1968, and I was 21.

'All right, I'd like to be like Pablo' I said.

'Who?' Dad said.

'Picasso, you know, the painter'.

'I've told you before, working class girls can't be artists'

'But I've been drawing since I was in nappies, you must have noticed!'.
'Put away childish things'

'Spare me' I said. 'Okay, I'll be a poet then, like Emily

Dickenson, she was American".

Dad thought that was some ambition, wanting to be a Yank, and a Yank poet at that. He reminded me that my brother was studying something useful, and why couldn't I?

'Engineering! That's considered useful, practical, essential is it? I got an arts degree' I said.

'Well, that's something I suppose. You can get an office job, companies choose arts graduates for their training programmes'

The University set up interviews for me. One company - Insurance - told me I wasn't aggressive enough, I went along to a Bank - same thing. I sloped off to the meat packing factory. The instant I stepped in the door, the stench hit me. Inside the main building, the smell was over-powering, yet no one there was wearing an oxygen mask or even wrinkling their nose. A bovine receptionist chewing a spearmint cud directed me to the personnel department. Mr Green the assistant personal manager, took me on a tour of the packing department. The docile herd of male and female workers seemed to be patiently waiting the slaughter, while, in glazed pens along the wall, prize bulls watched.

Mr. Green pointed his pink hoof at a space near the back.

'That's where you'll be' he oinked, 'if we decide to take you on'.

After leaving me in an empty room, to do several tests where I could hold a handkerchief to my nose. Green returned to say.

'I see nothing in your background that prepares you for a career in meat packing. That could mean that you'd bring a measure of candour to the job' He shook my hand. 'You'll be hearing from us' As he escorted me to the door, he said 'One thing in your favour, you don't wear too much make-up'. I left with mixed feelings. I couldn't stand the slaughter

smell - but at least I hadn't been rejected. I imagined myself a scion of Steaks, a champion of the Boiled Ham. My dad would be pleased - he would be able to look forward to truck-loads of half-price Bacon.

A week later Mr. Green rang to tell me that someone had beaten me for the job.

'You're obviously a nice girl' he said. 'Perhaps a little sensitive for our needs'

'What did he say, Babe?' My father asked me.

'They said I wasn't aggressive enough' I replied. 'Anyway' I told him, 'the stench inside was so bad, it was all I could do to stay on my feet. Perhaps I should go back to University, take a teachers training course'.

'No bloody fear!' my father said 'No more University. Out into the world, daughter mine! Babe you have to earn your living'.

'Dad, there are whole armies of bright, neat, clean hygienic women with shoe button eyes, and shoe button minds and shoe button souls, willing to dedicate their lives to the creation of wealth - there's no problem finding people to fill their ranks'.

'But what about you, Babe?' said Dad.

Yes, what about me? The odd-ball - who wanted to create something - I ought to have someone to cheer me on. Dad reminded me that he and Mum had never stopped me drawing! My Dad wasn't a tyrant. But he was a Yorkshireman and very practical. Oh, before I go any further. My name? Babe! Well, Babe Ruth was a baseball player, back in Nineteen hundred and way back.....

then, one year my pen-friend in Seattle sent me a collection of cigarette cards - and there he was - funny looking bloke, but I liked the name. I've been Babe ever since.

I think mum and dad intended to call me Beverley - but they thought they couldn't afford a name like that!

Then Dad said 'I know a man in the legal business. He needs someone for the post room. A young girl who can start from the ground up'

'From the ground up?' I asked. 'What on earth does that mean?'

Dad said it meant I'd learn the job.

'Wait a minute' Wait a minute' I said 'You are going to fast for me. You're suggesting a whole new life style and.....'.

'Life style' Dad interrupted. 'What do you know about life style? There's only one way to live and that's by the sweat of your brow'. You take up the law, my girl!'

The law? What did I know about the law? The only law I knew about was what had been drummed into me at Sunday school. Moses' law - the ten commandments. I've often thought that before Moses came down the mountain with those stone tablets - he ought to have got them countersigned by God. Perhaps we'd have all taken a bit more notice. I asked Dad how much did this law firm pay? He told me a fiver a week.....and vouchers. 'What on earth are vouchers?' I asked him.

He told me they were for lunch. 'Okay'. I said. 'Not much of a wage, is it?'

I thought I'd be spared 'That beggars can't be choosers'. I wasn't. Dad of course - had to remind me. Since I was penniless at the age of twenty-one, it was hard for me to argue against taking a job. So I started in the legal business, and painting became a hobby I reserved for my spare time. The York office of 'Hancock & Millers' was a medium sized branch. Head office was in London. Our branch was big enough to have two partners, Mr Hayes, and a younger man Mr Dixon.

Mr Hayes was a tall distinguished-looking man with perfectly groomed white hair. We seldom saw him. When he did walk through the office in his double-breasted, pin-striped suit, he wore a broad grin as if to say that he knew legal secrets that he would never reveal to the staff. Mr Dixon was younger and tenser, with long arms that banged against desk-tops as he paced around the office. Mr Hayes was the one who had hired me and I always felt that Mr Dixon did not approve of his choice.

They moved me from delivering legal papers to bookkeeping. But I wasn't developing fast enough for Mr Dixon. One day, he suggested that I join the Business Club. He told me that this Business Club would help turn me into a potential and efficient member of the legal profession. I went reluctantly to my first Club meeting, expecting to meet a herd of hearty fellas' with crunching handshakes, and girls with pink twin-sets and wearing strings of pearls. The first woman I met was Sheila Finlay (later to become my best friend) We were both in the ladies cloakroom, half out of our

raincoats before we realized that the place wasn't big enough for two grown woman to disrobe in. We both giggled and both of us ended up outside the room, back in our coats. 'Let's try again' she said.

With the extra space, we successfully got out of our raincoats and then we introduced ourselves. 'Babe' I said.

'Sheila Finlay last time I looked' she said. She wore black -framed glasses on a thin face that seemed prematurely lined, especially in the hollows of her cheeks.

'This your first meeting?' 'Yes' I said.

'I hope you can stand the monumental topics we discuss here. At the present we are hoping to build a house for refugees' 'Where' 'In the park'

'You're bringing refugees, here - to York?' 'No. They're going to raffle off the house and send the money to Oxfam for medical supplies. Probably get snaffled by some politician in a shiny blue suit'.

We had dinner together - while the guest speaker, a local radio newsreader, told us all what great work we were doing. I doodled on the table napkin. Sheila watched me do a caricature of the speaker. She laughed when she saw the news-readers nose take shape. 'You like drawing' she asked over the coffee later.

'Oh, I fool around with paint and such. Yes, I like it'. I said 'But you don't work at it full time?'. 'I'd like to, I replied. It's more practical to have a job, so I'm learning the legal business'.

'You should meet the people at the Arts club. We get together every Friday, would-be writers, artists, and coffee-table philosophers. Why don't you come along some Friday?'

'I'd like that' I said 'but could it wait till after Christmas? I'm heavily booked at the moment'. 'Of course. Are you married?' She asked me. 'No. Just sort of engaged to be engaged', I said. 'Oh, that explains it' she said.

But the road was becoming clear for marriage with Brian Trewin, home, children, and living together happily ever after. We even went to Church together - every Sunday! Yes, it was getting dangerously comfortable.

Chapter two.

The next morning, I woke up in my cluttered bedroom and heard my mother's Hoover. My mother had no respect for the weary on Saturday mornings and dad and I had either to get up or go insane listening to the Hoover whine.

I usually lay awake cursing the noise, but this morning I thought about the idea of being an artist and living in a garret. The Hoover drove me out of the house.

I went to see Brian. He told me that yesterday he'd bought a convertible Unit Bond in ICI and 300 shares of SA Gold. One for security, the other for risk. He said that the I thought they'd both take off. I told you he was boring.

But I pretended to be interested. It seemed the least I could do.

'Isn't that great' I said, 'being right there in the centre of the big financial world? You'll probably get to be a millionaire' 'I dare say I will' replied Brian. 'When we get married, we'll have a summer cottage in the Lake District....with roses around the door....and a town house in York with a garage and a cleaning lady'.

Brian had yuppie ambitions, twenty-five years ahead of anyone else.

'Lovely Brian'. I said. He went on - 'And I'll join the Golf Club. It's got a very nice Bar and Restaurant.....and I'll wear a cravat'.

My, won't he be debonair! 'That was a good move when you joined those Stockbrokers, Clark' I said. Now, Clark was my pet name for him - Superman Comics were very big in the sixties - way before the films of the 70's and 80's. The idea was that he was Superman in disguise.

Vomit-making isn't it? That night I let him slide his hand under my favourite canary cardigan - I kidded myself I loved him like mad! Trouble is a Woman starts off with her arms around a man and finishes up with her arms in a sink. Anyway, there he was batting out stocks and shares for his Company - and there was I - wanting something totally different. Brian hated anything bohemian - people who lived the way I planned to do. He respected people who mapped out their careers, those who knew whose job they wanted in five years. Maybe I should send him a letter 'So long Clark Kent - it's been fun' But the road was becoming clearer and clearer.

Marriage with Brian was becoming too close - and when he suggested we went to see our local Priest - panic arose in my craw. I saw the future mapped out. Years of 'The Financial Times' stuck between the toast rack and The Marmalade at breakfast. If I escaped, it would reduce onlookers to frenzied contempt, buttered with jealousy. I asked my new friend Sheila what she thought. She's training to be a first class - number one bitch! Sheila had met Brian at the Business Club and thought him a nice young man, and that I was a lucky girl. 'Did you let him feel you up?' She asked me. 'I've heard say he's really hot'. 'Well, Sheila' I said 'religion puts fear in you. If you get tempted, the Catholic Church is the best contraception'. 'What do you mean?' said Sheila. 'Sex passes the time lovely'. She thought he was the kind of young man everyone likes. That's why I was beginning to hate the sight of him. I know Sheila thought it wasn't Brian I hated, but my circumstances - too acceptable. Here I was, a nice university graduate, in a nice job, and someday I'd have a nice wedding, and move to a nice neighbourhood. But I lusted after something else. Poverty perhaps - or Sloth - or Rebellion. I wanted to retreat into a little place somewhere and paint all day, and lay around, drinking and smoking, and sleep with a man I didn't even like. Sheila asked me if Brian knew about these longings? He didn't, but my secret kept floating closer

to the surface. I saw myself in a paint-stained shirt,
open at the neck, sitting with brush, paints and easel.
Artists have models. I'd have a fella' modelling for
me. He'd stand there, relaxed, but as still as a marble
statue, in a torn T-shirt, his lips quivering in
anticipation of our next embrace. Plaster will hang off
the walls, and a mouse will make it's home in the
pantry.

When I told Sheila this, she said 'Why don't you go to Paris
and live in an attic? You like to paint and there's really
nothing holding you back?'

'But I could never afford a trip to Paris' I said.

'You could work your way over on a cargo-boat' Sheila said
'you could stow away on a plane. You could apply for a
government grant'.

I told her I had too many ties here. I couldn't go - just
like that!

Sheila thought I should quit my job and move into a garret
right here in York. 'You love to draw' she said 'You're too
young to get saddled with a nine to five job and a house in
the suburbs with Brian Trewin. Do what you want for awhile.
Who knows? You may even make it as a great artist'.

But I wasn't sure you could have that sort of life here in
York? Paris yes, I'd be shoulder to shoulder with all the
other impoverished daubers, but here?

Sheila thought giving the legal profession a year of my life
was quite sufficient.

'Hmm' I said 'but what....' Sheila mocked me - saying

'I know - what will your parents say?'

I knew Dad would go through the roof. Mum? Well, we all know what Mum's are like!

'If you're scared of quitting, try taking a holiday, live as an artist for three weeks? See if you like it' Sheila again - interrupting my thoughts.

'No, you're right' I said 'If I am going to be a painter in a garret. I have to be in a garret, not just pretending for three weeks. Right! I've decided. I'm quitting my job tomorrow'.

Sheila asked me what sort of notice did I have to give?

I said 'two weeks, I think. Will you help me look for a room ?'

'Whenever you like' she said 'Well, see you Babe. Good luck with your notice.....and your parents'

Chapter 3.

Next day, Sunday - Brian took my mother and me to Morning Mass. Sitting, kneeling or standing in the pew, I found my mind drifting. Here I am, I thought, playing the role of the nice girl to the hilt. As our red-faced Priest led a prayer for the Queen and the sick, I visualised Marion, posing for me - dressed as Marc Anthony in a white toga - and holding a golden shield against his hip. Oh, God, I prayed, give me courage to quit my job and move out of my house and do what I really want to do!

Next day, I waited on the corner for the bus, just as I did every weekday, but this time I could look at all the people

who waited with me and smile to myself, I wouldn't be shivering with them much longer. When I got on the bus and found a place between a fur-trimmed woman and a postman who were there every day, I didn't say a word to them. All I could do was smile and think of the days of bus less bliss that lay ahead of me. I wasn't a bit depressed by the jostling and jarring as we headed noisily to the city centre along the familiar obstacle course of morning traffic. Getting off the bus, I joined the 8pm wave of workers who rushed to be at their desks on time. It felt very odd to be among them and yet not be one of them anymore - like a tiddler going upstream with the salmon just for the ride.

It was like any other Monday at 'Hancock & Millers'. I walked dutifully into the office and went about my work, trying to be my business-as-usual self. A couple of the solicitors had me get clients securities out of the safe and put them in good shape, endorsed and ready for redrafting. People questioned me about filing problems. Clients came in to pick up legal papers. I kept busy but I couldn't forget this was D-day - the quitting day!

At mid-day, I went to the bank. This was Barclays on Micklegate. I walked up to the counter, and asked the young man if I could have an update on my current account. I watched him go to find the information, he had so much charm. I'd often wished he'd ask me out - the story was that he lived in his own flat and that placed him in a far more sophisticated class than I was in.

'Is it nice out?' he asked me, as he handed me a piece of paper with the account balance on. I was tempted to give my brother Robert's standard reply - 'Yes, in fact, I think I'll leave it out' Instead I gave my type of answer - 'It's as nice as you can expect this time of the year'. I smiled and turned to take my chequebook to one of the tables the bank provided for writing cheques and filling out deposit slips. Even though the bank clerk himself had just written the figures, I liked to be away from him when I looked at them. Privacy was important to banking. My up-to-date balance showed £354.8 shillings, a fortune amassed over eight years of delivering newspapers, several summers of odd jobs and a year and a half at 'Hancock & Millars'. It was enough to get me started. I withdrew £100.

By two o'clock I had done nothing about quitting. Mr Dixon came to my desk.

'Babe' he said in his strong radio announcer's voice 'I gave you a house deed to look over - did you check it?'

'Yes, sir'

'What did you learn?'

'I learned that the people are buying a house that has had twenty-two previous owners - and that it is over three hundred years old'.

'What conclusions have you made about whether this aforesaid property is a good investment or no?'

'None, sir'

'None?' None?' Have you no thoughts on the matter?'

'Well, our client's profession is fancy cakes - correct?'

'Yes, so?'

'I don't like cream cakes - they give me indigestion'

'Then your indigestion is holding us up. And we can't be held up. I want a complete analysis of the proposed purchase - by first thing in the morning'.

Mr Dixon red and boiled, stormed away, cursing me under his breath. Left in his wake, I now felt more like resigning. I got up from my desk and marched towards Mr Hayes's office.

There sat his secretary. She was a tweedy woman in her 50's who looked out of place behind a typewriter. She belonged behind a pair of knitting needles, producing woollen gloves for underprivileged children. 'What is it you want?' she asked me. 'I wish to see Mr. Hayes. But it's quite confidential, if you don't mind' I said.

Miss Lynch picked up the intercom telephone and buzzed. 'Mr. Hayes, I'm sorry to bother you, but Miss.....well, it's Babe - she'd like to see you' she said - sweetly enough for him but with a scowl to show me her annoyance. I distinctly heard him say 'Who?' 'You know - Babe, the girl who....yes, that's her'.

'You may go in' she said.

I entered Mr. Hayes's office and closed the door behind me. This was usually called "being on the carpet" but the broadloom was so thick that I felt in it rather than on it. The office was immense but Mr. Hayes was easy to find since

he looked so impressive, brilliant and rich. He sat tall behind his kidney-shaped desk. Glancing around me, I realized how seldom I'd been in this room, to be truthful - never. The founder-solicitors in portraits on the wall looked like those cough sweet family adverts. There were a number of upholstered chairs, a high window, two filing cabinets and a set of shelves filled with law books - and strangely enough books on how to sell things. And there was a thriving potted plant that stood like a green sentinel beside the tidy, well-polished desk.

But I had to stare at the man behind the desk. Funny how some people just look their professions. I'm sure people would have needed just one glance at Winston Churchill and they'd have said 'There is a leader of men' I looked at Mr. Hayes and thought 'There is a solicitor' 'All right' he said and he finished signing something, probably a cheque for a hundred thousand pounds 'what's on your mind?'

'It's just that I want to resign' I said. That cut through all the pleasantries we might have indulged in. 'So, you want to resign? Just supposing we all resigned, walked out to be a Disc-jockey or whatever?'

'I don't want to be a Disc-Jockey' I said.

Hayes thought that whatever bothered me, could be easily smoothed over. If people can look daggers, then he was stabbing me to death. 'I just want to resign and try something else'. 'This is just a whim, you'll get over it'.

'I hate the legal business and I want to be an artist in an attic. I feel I've been mistreated' - I told him. I stopped talking - my tongue was running off.

'Go on' he said.

'Well sir, you know it's my job to check all documents before they go out?'

'Yes' said Mr Hayes 'and your work is very satisfactory. The staff tell me that they've never seen the firms stamp printed so squarely and neatly on the documents'.

'Well, sir' I said, making my face as blank as I could, 'I've been given a conveyance document today - to check it and our clients credentials - and then been ordered to eat fancy cream cakes for purposes of research - I thought that would have been outside my job description'.

He looked taken aback, and if ever a face was nonplussed, his was.

Ah. well - might as well be hung for a Cow as a Calf. 'I don't like that strong tea or those plain biscuits we are served at eleven every day'.

He told me that was completely out of his province.

'Under the circumstances, if I had to keep eating those biscuits - it would be impossible to stay with the company a minute longer' I was just about to leave.

'Wait a moment, young lady'

I stopped by the panelled door.

'You can't leave' he said 'you've got to give notice'.

'Sorry.' I said 'I feel the way caged lions must feel - how easy to say goodbye to a prison'.

I got up. My nerves and legs felt taut. I walked briskly out of his office.

Mr Dixon was waiting. 'Wait' He cried, scrambling after me.

'I've heard from Miss Lynch - and you can't leave us with our tits in the mangle - you've got to give a months notice'.

'Dixon!!' I heard Mr Hayes say in his stern impressive voice 'You come into my office at once - and tell me all about this business of asking our young lady clerks to eat cream cakes - that is, if you can speak without taking your vocabulary from the gutter.....' I didn't wait to hear the rest. I got my coat and left before anyone stopped to ask me what had happened. I walked through the brass handled doors - onto the High Street. The lioness was out of the cage at last.

Chapter 4.

Wandering rather aimlessly along the street, I came to one of the many narrow cafe's you could find all over the city, the ones with the tattered, typewritten menus and the chipped plastic counters. I went in and sat down to a toasted crumpet, happy to be alone. I was only on my second bite when a friend of mine slid into the chair beside me. 'Babe, nice to see you' said Tilly Edwards, a shorthand typist and an exuberant girl - if ever I knew one. 'Nice place to find you - I notice they have terrific caviar and scrambled eggs here'.

Whenever I saw Tilly - which was very infrequently these days - she'd make these silly ironic statements which we used to call "The Fulford Slang" because we believed our suburb was the only place that used it. On a blizzardly morning we'd say 'Nice spring day, I notice' it sounded childish to me now, and I wondered if Tilly spoke that way in her office 'My typewriter ribbon is worn out, I notice'. 'I just dropped in for a snack' I said. 'It's close to Hancock & Millars, I heard, said Tilly 'I notice it's quite normal to go miles away for a tea break.

Real slave-driver you work for, putting you through the grinder like this. Making a huge decision about where to deliver your briefs, I bet' she fell about at that.

I forced a grin.

'Well, I notice you're not lucky to work in stocks and bonds. I'd not be in that business even if I wasn't a P A. Hey! Things haven't been going my way. I haven't got a boyfriend well, not really, you notice. Though I did meet some chap coming in on the bus the other week. His father's a real tramp, doesn't own half of the city. He failed to like me so he didn't bother to come here and visit me the other day'. She leaned toward me confidentially 'Of course, my terrible-looking boy-friend knows all about him, I notice. Well, this Reg chap and I didn't get tiddly down the pub, and he didn't get very pash....oh, no! I refused to go into the bedroom with him. He didn't grab me under the coats, I notice'. 'So, he didn't go all the way?' I said. 'No - I notice'. Tilly gritted her teeth and rammed her right fist into her left palm. She laughed raucously.

'Want something' the man at the cash register called to her. 'Yes, I do' laughed Tilly. She got off the chair and backed toward the door. 'Don't phone me sometime, I hate having a drink with my old friends' she stopped at the door. 'Hey, you'd hate my silly office - they don't put my name on the door'. Ever poor, see? See you square'. She turned and left. Finishing my snack, I paid the man who wore armbands on his shirt-sleeves - he looked greedily at my ten bob note. I imagined that everyone would look greedy, now that I didn't have a regular income. Outside, I was thankful that it wasn't too cold - I didn't want to go home until the usual knocking-off time. Meeting Tilly had depressed me. I hadn't even had the guts to tell her what I was going to do. Not chicken, I notice!

Chapter 5.

I walked under the bare trees, safe in the knowledge that all the birds had gone south. I lingered near the Guildhall, recalling the chattering and chirrup of the summertime birds, admiring the handsome, yet grotesque, heart-warming building. After dinner at home, where I spoke animatedly about cream cakes and conveyancing without saying anything about throwing-in my job, I phoned Sheila. Later, we met on the corner of Paragon and Fishergate. 'Well?'

'I did it' I told her.

'Good for you. How much notice did you have to give?' 'None. I walked out on them...I'm free!! Want to go and look at garrets?'

Sheila did her American thing 'Sure thing, kid'. We unfolded a street map.

Sheila looked thoughtful and then asked me what area did I want to live in?

'I think it has to be on the left bank of the River'.

'The river Ouse isn't exactly the Seine is it?' Sheila said.

'Never mind. Which is the left bank? How do you work it out?'

'Well' I said 'you face the river....and the bank on your left is the Left Bank'.

Sheila didn't look too sure about this. 'How far away from the river can you be, and still be on the left bank?' 'Let's see.....these streets here.....' I looked at the Map 'I'd call them all left bank'.

'Okay....if you say so. Let's go, I'm freezing standing here'.

We walked into the next street in silence, broken only by Sheila's cigarette cough. We plodded along Castle Mill bridge in our high heels. The rain wasn't quite pouring down but it threatened us with drizzly warnings. But I was so keyed-up that I hardly noticed where we trudged.

As we got to Coney Street, we found lots of people loitering outside a cinema, the snooker hall, cafes, and pubs, and the second-hand clothing shop, despite the cold weather. I suppose some had been born in other Northern cities and had come here expecting these muddy white streets to be greener. Many had likely lived here all their lives. Some were dressed in gifts from the Salvation Army and discards from Oxfam, some drunk, some doped up on pot, some shy, some rough and rugged, some weak, some without friends, some without homes, some hungry, some afraid, and some just down-at-heel. An occasional Bank Manager came out of a door, looking serious and prosperous and healthy, but then a woman in a torn coat and a bright green dress would walk pass and put the scene back in order. We saw two or three men picking up discarded cigarette packets, another man standing in a doorway making a speech about nothing, an old man in a thread-bare coat throwing-up between buildings, and two beefy men in tartan shirts starting a fight. Policeman patrolled in pairs. We passed another cinema that was so covered in gaudy posters that you had to look hard to find the box office. We passed a badly-lit hotel, a dingy restaurant and a large group of grumbling men. I have to admit that I was a bit scared - but if I was going to lead the bohemian life, this was surely where I'd find it.

We turned off into Queen Street near the Railway Station. We hadn't spoken, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible. Sheila turned to me with a tiny half-smile that reminded me of both the Mona Lisa and the Cheshire Cat. 'Keep your eyes open for furnished rooms signs, she said 'your career as an artist is about to begin'. The third house on the left in the next street had a sign 'Guest House' and 'Vacancies - Apply within' - nailed to a fence in front of a narrow three-storey house that looked as if it had been wedged between its neighbours by a giant mallet. I took a deep breath of the damp air. The garden gate was stuck, so we climbed over. I knocked on the bright blue door.

'Do you want to do the talking'? Sheila asked me.

'You take the first one, I'll let you know if I like it'.

The small man who opened the door - looked like a drowned Yorkshire terrier, who'd been pegged out on a line to dry.

'Brenda's Boarding House, can we help you'?

Sheila said that we wanted to see one of the rooms they were advertising.

'Sorry, only one lady to a room' said the man.

'It's for my friend, not both of us' Sheila told him.

'Don't she talk then?' asked the man.

'Not unless the occasion warrants it' I said.

'Wait on.....wait on...this is a Boarding-House' said the man.

'Yes, my friend only wants the room, not the board'.

'She has to eat with the rest of us'.

'I suppose she might eat here' said Sheila 'can we see the room?'

The man wasn't sure about this either. But supposed we could.

'But I tell you' he said 'havin' a woman around the house who don't talk would give me the creeps. Come on in then, remember though, you gotta' eat here'.

I thought it might be necessary to be small and bony to live in such a narrow house. We entered the hall - full of bikes and old newspapers. 'I'm stuck, I can't get through' I cried.

'She can talk' quipped the man.

'Come on Babe, we've made it through' said Sheila.

'You don't have to live here, get me out'.

They pulled me through the gap - bits of pink plaster came with me.

'For a lady that don't talk' said the man 'you sure enough can make a mess'.

I said it wasn't my fault that the passage was narrow.

We followed him in, past a tiny living room where a radio blared and a pair of blue-jeaned legs started thumping on the back of a toffee coloured chesterfield, keeping time with Elvis and 'Don't be Cruel'.

We went up some stairs with a broken banister between the chimney and the wall, Sheila followed him. I went next.

We entered a rose wall-papered room - where there was an iron bed - on casters, a lumpy mattress, a mirror, and a basin.

'Not bad, you could set up your easel over there' said Sheila.

'Easel?' said the man 'You mean she's a drawer?'

'Oh, yes, she's top drawer'. Sheila was ever the wit.

'Well?' asked the man.

I told him I didn't care for the room, too bare, and it faced south. 'We artists need northern light, you know'.

'Fussy, ain't she?' said the man - who I now took to be the landlord.

'This is not what we want' I said 'Could you show us another room?'

'That's the best we have madam-fancy-drawers'.

'I don't need the best. I don't like it is all'.

The man bellowed. 'Brenda!!!'

A few moments later a woman appeared from a steamy kitchen who was so fat that not only could she never have squeezed through that hall, she could hardly fit into the main floor area. In her chubby fists she clutched a broom.

'Yeah?'

'We got ourselves another couple of sightseers' The man again. 'I show them the room, and you know what - they don't want board'.

Big Brenda asked us if we were casin' the place? 'You ladies better get the hell out of this street, before I knock you into the....'

'We have every right not to like.....' Sheila did not complete the sentence.

'This one here says that one there.....is a Drawer Bren'....would you say she looks like a Drawer?'

'Drawer'? Drawer?' 'We don't want no fucking artists' said Brenda. 'Now scoot'.

She was waving the broom as if it was a fly swatter when the blue-jeaned legs appeared this time with their owner, a lean white-faced teenaged girl with stringy hair and a plentiful collection of pimples.

'Hey, man, you wanna hear some way out sounds?' she asked me.

'No Marilyn, they're just leaving' Brenda snorted.

'Some Guest House' I said. We hurried out of there just in time to avoid the descending broom which connected with the closing door.

Chapter 6.

Next morning, I woke up at my regular time of seven-thirty, and realised that I had nowhere to go. It seemed absurd to struggle out of bed when it was so warm and cosy there. I thought about the night before. After Brenda's farewell, we'd gone to one more house where a man with no left leg showed us a room stacked with curtains, cushions and furniture covers. It was hard to breath in there. We gave up for the evening and went to a pub, where Sheila talked about her job.

Then - the fireworks! 'Babe! Babe! You'll be late!!'

My mother's loudest calling voice rolled down the hall and up the stairs and through my door. I slid out of bed and meandered into the bathroom. After I'd cleaned my teeth, had a shower, I was automatically about to apply a little makeup, and then realised I didn't have to. As I looked at myself in the mirror, I remembered one of the questions on the aptitude test that the meat company had set me 'What do you think to yourself when you look in a mirror?' Rumour had it that the right answer for getting the job was 'Hello, you gorgeous creature you'. That never seemed to be my thought in front of a mirror.

Back in my room, I wondered if I should dress in a skirt and continue the charade of going to work. Or should I put on casual stuff and saunter to the breakfast table? That would hit them with the full force of the new me. Well, I had showered. That was one step toward continuing the game.

I fingered the sleeve of my blue denim shirt, hanging there in the wardrobe that Dad had built because this room didn't have a hanging space. I looked over at my desk. It had seen both me and my brother through University. Beside it was a cardboard box full of vintage 'Photoplay's' including my favourite ones with Alan Ladd - and comics with 'Tarzan and Jane - King & Queen of the Jungle' My drawings of men were always influenced by the shapely chap, whose legs kept stepping out of the comic strip panels. On the other side of the bed was a small bookcase.

Lying on top of my University texts was my latest acquisition - 'Tarzan & Jane In New York'. In one corner was the ham radio outfit that my brother used to operate every night for over a year. We still had his wooden aerial tower in the back garden. It struck me that there were more traces of my brother around the house than there was of me, and he didn't live here anymore - he'd got married and moved on. I decided against a skirt.

'BAAAAAABE!!....You'll miss your bus'.

'Be there in a minute, mum'

I strode into the kitchen. I was changing into my flares - tucking my blue shirt in.

'Morning' I said.

Dad was bent over his bacon. My boiled egg sat there cooling.

My Mother who usually ate her breakfast after we'd gone, stood at the sink.

'What's this?' she asked. She looked at me, her questioning gaze taking in my outfit. She was running water into a pan and the noise continued as I sat down. When I started to speak, she turned it off.

'It's casual day at the office' I told her.

'It's what? Don't be bloody daft girl' This was dad.

He didn't like me to fool around when they expected a straight answer.

My mother tried to keep the peace. 'Now Father, don't go getting angry. You know these companies will do strange things for business these days'.

'They will' Dad said 'Get on with your breakfast Babe, or you'll miss the bus - it's late you know'.

'I don't think I'll be going to work today'. My hands tightened on the butter knife as my stomach did flips, and I prepared for the family crisis.

'What's all this about Babe' said my mum 'are you not well?'

Dad wanted to know if all this had anything to do with Sheila. 'What's her background?' he said.

'In a way, it is to do with her' I said 'why?'

'I don't like the sound of this. She's leading you astray'.

My mother reminded Dad that I was over eighteen - and old enough to pick my own friends.

'That's it! Side with her! Look at her, look at them trousers. Shameful!'

'Dad, you know how I like to paint?'

'We've been through all this before. I told you, it's a good hobby.

I told them I'd decided to devote full-time to it. That I'd

quit my job! They both yelled.....'What!!'

'Hold on, young woman' said dad 'Do you mean to tell me

you've quit Hancock and Millers - with no other job to go

to?'

'Yes' I told him.

'Have you no self-esteem?' This was my mother.

Now - my parents thought self esteem was produced by

education and hard work. They couldn't see what disqualified

me was temperament.

Dad then asked the £64,000 dollar question. 'And you're going

to draw - all day?'

"Yes". Well, I know "Yes" was inadequate but that was

all I could say really.

'After all I've said about working class girls becoming

artists?'

'Are you working-class then dad?' I asked him.

"No, certainly not" he replied 'Middle of the road me - I

suppose'. My mother spoke up 'I won't have you around here all day,

getting in the way, you've got to earn your keep Babe. Speak

to her Dad'.

'I'm trying to, aren't I'. Dad's Yorkshire upbringing came

through loud and clear. 'Look, Babe - if you are serious

about this and not bloody joking, then you'd better get out

of this house and stay out!'

Dad trying to play the Victorian father was a laugh. At that moment I relished the idea of being thrown out. It added piquancy to my whole plan. Dad himself had often said that the most successful people got going - only after a good kick in the backside.

'If that's the way you want it, I'll get my stuff together and move out of here today'.

'Oh, do sit down and finish your breakfast first' said my mother.

'The decision's made, Mum'.

Mum looked panic-stricken, there among her pots - pans and appliances.

'Look here' said my father 'do you mean you're leaving that bloody good job I got you? You sure you weren't fired?'

'I resigned - yesterday'.

Dad looked if he might exit from this family scene.

My mum asked him where he was going?

'Somebody has to work around here'.

My mother pointed out - that he hadn't eaten his egg or finished his bacon!

I once read "For those you make friends, and give your heart to, when once they perceive the least rub in your

fortunes.....fall away, like water from ye, n'er found

again" I thought that very appropriate in the circumstances. Sheila telephoned, saying she'd made an appointment for me to see Downing at the Fine Arts Department. He'd see me at his house at ten this morning. She thought I might be able to pick up a few tips. She'd told him I was a budding genius.

'Thanks' I said

'You're welcome' said Sheila 'I haven't told him what you intend to do, it'll be interesting to see how he reacts'.

I'm not sure I wanted to see anyone from Fine Arts, but what the hell!

Chapter 7.

I went to see Downing. I rang his doorbell. Immediately I heard a dog bound to the door, where it barked and scratched, muffling the sound of approaching human feet. The door opened. The head of a bespectacled man appeared and a red-eyed, yellow-haired mongrel leapt out into the front garden. 'You must be.....' said the man. 'I'm Downing, you're very punctual. Won't you come in?'

He sat in a leather Armchair. He wore a suit, shirt and tie...but was barefoot.

'Your friend Sheila had some good words to say about you, did you bring any of your work with you?' 'No, I forgot' I said.

At that moment the mangy mongrel dog bounded into the room, put it's forepaws up on me and started licking my face. Downing seemed to be slightly perturbed, not by the dog's lack of manners but by my lack of grace in receiving the dog's welcome.

The studious-looking Downing was not my idea of a bachelor dog-lover, he would have been more at home with a chinless, tea-pouring wife and two grubby children. He seemed so oblivious to noise, yet how could he be oblivious to this

bounding, barking, sportive mutt?

'That's a terrible scar he's got on his ear' I said.

'Yes' said Downing 'he has periods of mental depression and insanity, like Van Gogh you know. One day he got his ear between his paw and the floor and tried to rip it off.

'Poor...what's-his-name?'

'Gauguin' Downing told me.

That's nice' I said 'Good dog Gauguin'.

Downing asked me to sit down. I sat opposite him, whilst he tried to shove his feet into a pair of old slippers. He kicked one away in disgust.

'Both right feet. This dog of mine always steals my left ones - a real socialist you know'.

"You should call him Trotsky' I said.

'What?'

'Nothing' I said.

Downing was sat down opposite me, one foot in a slipper and the other bare. I noticed his toes were unusually dexterous -he was snapping the largest two together impatiently. The living-room, didn't invite living and lacked any real room. This was no ordinary, musty bachelor-flat showing signs of hurried and impatient attempts at cleaning. This place was downright dirty. There were old newspapers littering all the furniture, chewed and bloody dog-bones on the shabby rug, creased art publications lying askew in three corners, an old fashioned console radio with teeth-marks on the frame and shattered glass over the dial, two old shoes, four or five bookcases, stuffed with journals and reference books, an

apple core, two Corot prints, two brimming waste paper baskets, a stamp album, a sofa with a dislodged spring, a grotesque rocking-chair, two lamps that looked like vases wearing hats, a magazine rack, and several heaps of notes which were either unpublished theses or student papers. Not sure how to react to this disorganized scene, I could only pat the tyke's bobbing wide-eyed head and say 'Nice Doggie' as it started on my socks, wagging his tail all the while.

'Now' said Downing 'since you neglected to bring any examples of your work with you, you'll have to dash off something for me, so that I can see your potential. To what do you aspire? Do you wish to emulate the old masters, or are you a modern?'

'I'd like to be a realist, I'm thinking of going in for Art full-time'.

'Well. Babe....that's what they call you is it?'

'Yes' I told him.

'Well Babe, when I first saw you, I didn't think you were the type with the desire, the devotion to Art. Do you intend going back to University to pursue your studies'.

'Well...erm....not exactly' I said. I knew I had aroused the professor's interest by giving him the wrong impressions about my future. I wished I could explain myself better, but, what with that moth-eaten mutt chewing at my clothes, I could hardly think straight.

'Not exactly?' he queried.

'You see sir, I graduated with a B.A....then went to work in a law office, but I always liked to draw, and when I met Sheila, she encouraged me to devote more time to it. She said she knew you. and you might give me a few tips on how to get started'.

'Ah, on your Art education, is that it?' said Downing. That's what you're trying to say, isn't it?

The dog grew vicious. 'Oh, no! Gauguin! Don't pull like that, you'll tear my skirt'.

Downing pulled the Dog off me.

'Thank you, Sir, I do want to further my Art education. I know it's been neglected, and that's why I'm going to do....sort of....'

He looked hopeful. 'Ah, you're coming back to University full-time?'

'Uh...No' I told him.

At this the Dog lunged at me once more. I moved my leg, so this time his teeth sank into the chair cushion.

'What are you going to do then, go back to infants school?' roared Downing.

I grinned. There was a silence, except for the dog, who was now ripping the cushion to shreds.

'Who is your favourite Artist?'

'Well, sir, I like.....Owwwww!...Gauguin!!'

'Do you?'

'No, Sir. I was speaking to the Dog, he nipped my leg'.

'He does that, take no notice, he's becoming egotistical'.

I then told him that I like Picasso quite a lot.

'That old fraud. Coffee?'

'Please'.

He boiled some water and dropped a half-teaspoonful of instant coffee into each cracked cup. There were no saucers. The kitchen was as littered as the living room.

'I like Renoir a lot' I said.

'Renoir?'

'Yes'

'That panderer of sentimentality. A painter of chocolate boxes. Surely your taste in art runs beyond that?'

I sipped my coffee. By now I was quite hungry, but Downing provided no biscuits or fruit cake. The dog however was more fortunate. The professor took a box of coloured Dog biscuits, and started plying the Dog with one after another. It made me cringe to watch that mutt's disgusting mouth greedily accepting every biscuit. Was he deliberately being rude by feeding Gauguin and not me? No, I think that the dog was just more important.

'Now. let me get this right. Do you mean that with your limited academic background, you actually intend to paint?'

"Yes. I intend to paint in seclusion right here in York. I am going to move into a Left Bank studio, with a man to pose and amuse me'.

Downing laughed. 'Ha! Ha!. The left bank, eh? Here in York?'
T start my Art career, tomorrow'.

Downing waved his arms at the bookcase 'See these? These represent years of labour to become educated. I did not get to be a Professor of Fine Art by daubing on an old canvas in a garret, and I did not get to be a Professor of Art by living with some sweet little thing with big breasts. I read and I read. I can pick out a Goya or a Van Dyke, from any National Gallery at one hundred feet. I only became educated because I studied, and studied hard!'

'Professor, what type of painting do you do?'

He stood up, his mouth agape. The Dog ran under a chair.

'!?......!?'

'You know so much about Art' I said 'but you? What do you do?'

'Babe, my dear girl, theory is the thing, with theory you can paint anything, all you need is the initial knowledge'.

'Professor Downing, I don't give a damn about theory. I am going to paint what I see'.

Downing sank into his chair. As he did so he whispered

"Gauguin.....Kill!!!"

The Dog leapt at me - I jumped back - crashing into a wall of books, bringing them down. The Dog brought down a torrent of heaven Literature. He yelped as "The History of Art" in ten volumes hit him. I managed to dodge most of the heavy artillery, and only got a Penguin paperback of Tintoretto in the back of the head - but trying to avoid the other volumes, I had to catapult myself into another section of shelves. These teetered and fell. Books tumbled everything. A squealing Gauguin darted into a cupboard. I escaped, grabbed my coat and fled, allowing myself a backward glance at the turmoil. Crestfallen on the chair and immersed in books, that had educated him - was the poor Professor. I noticed

'The Letters of Vincent Van Gogh' published in three volumes winking from their new home in the battered Dog Biscuit box. Once outside in the air, I ran into the street. I was free to be the kind of artist I wanted to be, whatever kind of artist that was - whenever I wanted to start. I felt ecstatic. I began to whirl around, throwing my arms up to the clear blue sky. I whirled until I began to feel dizzy and collapsed on the road kerb, laughing like a lunatic. In fact I nearly wet myself laughing. Later in the Tea-shop I saw Sheila.

Chapter 8.

'How did it go with Downing?' Sheila asked me. 'Great, he got mad when I told him what I wanted to do -things did get a bit out of hand - sort of - he's not a friend of yours, is he?' 'Why?' asked Sheila. 'I knocked over his bookshelves'. Sheila thought that was terrific. I told her I'd like to forget about it. She wanted to know more 'Was he hopping mad?' I said I ought to go.

'No, no, I've got several places for you to see'. Ten minutes later we were confronted by a woman with hair in curlers.

'Guess vot?' said the lady in curlers 'Two weeks ago, diss' fella moves in here....just fer a coupla' days, shakin' with the booze, dried out, right in this room. And do you know, I found out he's a Priest'.

'Perhaps his spirit is still lurking about?' said Sheila.

'What? '

There was no skylight. No dangling light bulb. I said I thought we should look at other places.

'Good enough for man of God, not good enough for you?'

The woman kept shrugging as we left.

'I liked the room' said Sheila.

'I must not get impatient' I said.

Sheila smiled as she lighted her fifth cigarette of the evening.

The next house looked wider than the others we'd seen. A crooked wrought-iron fence ran across the front. We trod carefully on the slippery concrete steps up to a door that was hanging rather oddly on its hinges. The house could have once been called a mansion by some optimist, but it was now just a run-down guest house, stripped of most of its paint and all of its owners pride.

'Great, eh?' Sheila said. 'Right in the middle of the main stream of Real Life'.

I knocked.

Our next Landlord was equipped with a hearing-aid and a Woodbine stained vest.

'Yeah?' he shouted in a voice I can only describe as old and rattly. I didn't think he'd seen us yet because he seemed to be talking to a tweed overcoat hanging inside the door.

'We're over here' I said. 'We'd like to see the room you have in the attic. We're interested in renting it'.

'Eh?' he said pointing to his hearing-aid.

Sheila shouted back 'We'd like to see the room.'

Pointing to his hearing-aid again - he shouted back 'You'll hafta' speak up'.

Sheila shouted 'Mr. Marriott?'

'Why you telling me that - I know my name, you know'.

'Sorry, of course you do'

It was my turn to shout 'Mr. Marriott, we want to see your attic. I'll pay rent in advance.....if I like it'.

'Come on in' Mr Marriott said. Before he let us enter, he spat past us out into the front garden.

We followed him inside, past a yellow-painted, carved wooden archway leading into an old-fashioned living-room that looked all antimacassars-on-furniture and plates-on-wall-racks. We went up a flight of steep stairs, ducking under irregular globs of plaster and stepping into a second floor hall. Seven doors faced us. Pulling and speaking in barely perceptible noises, Mr Marriott managed to convey to us that four of the doors were entrances to tenant's rooms. The fifth opened on the toilet, the sixth on a basin and bath. The seventh was set in the wall a foot above the floor. Mr Marriott slowly opened it. Behind the door was a narrow stairway that might have passed for a ladder in most circles. This took us - very gradually because of Mr Marriott's tortoise pace - to the room under the eaves. Marriott lead us in. A single light bulb hung from the ceiling. A bed, a small dresser. Two painted orange boxes.

And a framed print of a ship on a ghostly sea - and a calendar illustrated with a spectacular girl, posing beside a large American car.

I looked at the Calendar. August, 1947. Flies had used it as their graveyard.

To one side, was a tiny fridge, circa 1951. A tiny Belling Cooker. A table. Most remarkable of all was the skylight covering about thirty feet of the sloping ceiling above the bed. Three of the panes were cracked. A perfect garret - and it faced north.

'I like it' I beamed. 'When can I move in?'

'Eh?'

I tried shouting 'When can I move in?'

Mr Marriott was panting so hard that I thought he might die right there.

'Tonight' he said, 'don't shout, I'm not.....'

'Deaf I said. 'Great...about eight o'clock?'

'Eh?'

'About eight?'

'You'll have to speak up' he said - 'I'm a bit deaf good, yeah. Good'.

Mr Marriott's voice trailed off. His eyes fluttered and he slumped against the wall. Sheila asked me to give her a hand with him - as we had to get him downstairs. I was alarmed - but we carried the poor old man down to the main floor where we laid his trail body on the sofa, two cushions under his head.

'It's the old ticker' Marriott told us 'gives out every now and again. Medicine in my pocket'.

Sheila looked in his right-hand waist-coat pocket, and I tried the left. She found a small bottle of whisky. 'That's it. You're good girls'. We give him a slug.

Sheila said he'd be fine. I thought I'd better go home and pack. I gave Mr. Marriott the rent. He took a key from around his neck, and gave it to me. He then relaxed back on to the floor, drinking his whisky. 'Thank you Mr. Marriott, see you later' I said. We left him to his comforts.

Sheila said this new life would save me from the comforts of my middle-class- white-anglo-Yorkshire-Protestant back-ground. She thought it may be rescuing me from it all just in time. 'I'm Catholic' I said.

Really? I never knew. Well, you're still white and middle-class .

We walked around for a while, talking about my plans until we were freezing. After two hot chocolates in a cafe, Sheila left me and I wandered over to Woolworth's, killing time until I met Brian. As I approached his offices, an empty taxi parsed - on an impulse, I flagged it down. The cab would be nicely distracting. I told the driver to wait until Brian came out. When he appeared in the doorway, he looked pretty good. As I watched him look around for me, I wanted to marry him. At that moment it seemed totally insane for me to think of moving into that big old house with that dying old man. Brian looked young, good-looking and fresh, at that moment he seemed to be exactly the kind of man I could be happy with

for the rest of my life. I opened the taxi door and stepped onto the kerb.

'Taxi, sir' I said to Brian.

'What are you doing in a taxi?' he beamed.

I held the door open for him as he stepped into the cab.

'Extravagance. Is this your way of announcing a raise?' he said.

He looked at me expectantly as I got in beside him. I liked the way he wore his hair, not too short, with a wavy bit at the front.

'I have something to show you' I said, trying my best not to sound tragic.

I wasn't sure he liked surprises. I told the driver the street name and we drove away. I put my arm around Brian and his bulky tweed coat, and nestled into him as if we were newlyweds being whisked off to the reception. Half way there, he looked into my face with a happily suspicious expression that said 'what have you gone and done, you sneaky one, you?' I shuddered and he must have mistaken this for ardour because he gave me a seductive look and placed his hand on my thigh. I always felt mischievous in the back seat of taxis. We clung to each other. I was clinging for the wrong reason - holding on because I wanted to protect him from the heartbreak I was going to cause him, or maybe holding on for one last clinch because I felt sorry for myself. Or, maybe I was hugging him close so I didn't have to look him in the face.

When the taxi turned the street of old houses he looked out blankly. I

expected he wondered where on earth I was taking him.

I stopped in front of the two-and-a-half-storey place with the crooked fence, his face was as full of questions as an exam paper. After telling the driver to wait, I guided Brian over the wet pavement, through to the front door, which was unlocked. I pushed through, past the living room where Mr Marriott was loudly snoring, up the steep stairs, through the second floor door, and up, up to the room - which looked incredibly dark and dingy now that the night was falling and causing the sky beyond the skylight to blend in with the indigo ceiling. I found the light switch string hanging from the dangling bulb and pulled it. I saw that Brian had turned white. He wore the same look of horror that had taken over his face the time we saw a documentary on the state of housing in Liverpool.

'I've quit my job' I said. 'I'm leaving home and I'm moving in here tonight. I'm going to be an artist - here - right here'.

Biting his upper lip, he ran from the room as if it had suddenly caught fire. I called his name as I ran downstairs after him but he didn't answer. Two doors opened as we ran past them but I didn't get a look at the tenants. Brian ran out into the street and dove head first into the taxi. I stopped on the doorstep. When the cab driver bent to look at me through his front shield, I gave him a half-hearted wave that sent them on their way.

Chapter 9.

Taking a bus to my place - I mean, my parents place - I found nobody home. I used my key, went in through the back door, and found a note on the kitchen table. It read 'We're over at your brother's for dinner. If you haven't had anything, there's a Ham salad in the fridge. See you later -Mum'.

The note made me mad. Did my mother think I actually had no intention of moving out? I hurried to the basement for my suitcase, took it to my room and started packing. Sheila arrived ten minutes later.

I dumped my suitcase on the bed and started to pack a few things. Important things - my Rag Doll Sal, my Yellow Elephant Peter, made out of a discarded rug. My Paddington Bear - and a multi-coloured Clown called Pinch that grinned from ear to ear - and of course Sid my Teddy. My girlhood memories crowded in, but Sheila ran right over them. 'Good God Babe, don't pack your Teddy-Bear, you're an artist now, you're past all that'. 'I may come back home for Sunday dinner'. 'No, no' Sheila said 'This has to be a clean break'.

I couldn't help reminding her that she still lived at home. 'True. But then I'm not an artist' Anyway it's been my home all these years. They made me angry sometimes, but my mother does cook great meals and my father tells pretty good war stories. 'You mean you don't hate them?'

'No. They gave me everything I wanted'.

'Did you tell Brian yet?'

'Yes, I did. I even showed him the room'.

'What did he say?'

'Nothing. He just ran out. I think I broke his heart'

'I'm sorry'.

'It's probably for the best. He wouldn't have been satisfied until I was Chairman of the Law Society'.

We left the security of my old bedroom and walked down the unfriendly street.

'Hey. do you want to stop for food?' Sheila asked me.

'What now? A Cafe?'

'No. for goodness sake, groceries'.

'Will there be a shop open?' I asked.

This was before the days of late night shopping. Sheila pulled me into a small store with cardboard cigarette displays in the window.

'What do you want for tomorrow's breakfast?' Sheila asked as we went in.

'Let's see. I suppose...er.....coffee...tea....I can manage on toast and marmalade'.

I'd never cooked a meal in my life. I've never even shopped for food.

My Mum always took care of that. I'd lived at home when I was at the University in York. It was only four bus stops away. I loaded Oranges, Cornflakes, Bread, Margarine - into a wire basket. Sheila found some sliced bread while I remembered you put milk in tea. As I watched the man pack my groceries into a plastic bag, I felt a pang of disappointment. My first step towards artistic individuality was a dull domestic chore.

It started to snow as we walked to my new home. As we left the grocers shop a large snowflake landed on my nose.

The sight of snow carried special meaning, a cold, bleak and lonely existence awaited me out there. How stupid could I get, giving up home and hearth for a shabby little room in the slum part of the city.

We entered Mr. Marriott's premises. We climbed the stairs and entered my new room. I unlatched my suitcase. Out of it fell a small silver trophy. Sheila picked it up, and read the inscription 'Ladies Dart Champion - The Plough - 1963' Why have you brought this with you?

'Until I get an award for Art, that's the only thing I've ever won'.

'But does it fit your idea of studio decor?'

'I want to keep it' I said.

'Where you going to put it?'

'Er.....on top of the fridge?'

Sheila shook her head. 'I don't think so Babe'.

'Look' I said 'I can't drive a car. I can't do algebra, but I sure as hell can play darts'.

'Okay, okay. I have to go. Do you still want to get a model?'

'I certainly do' I said.

'Ah'

'Yes, and I want to interview applicants. Do you think I should advertise?'

'Not at first, if at all. I know at least two blokes who might do. One of them is someone you know'. 'That I know?' Sheila smirked.

'Oh, no' I said 'not Brian Kelly. He's a nipple-tweaker'. Sheila shook her head. Could it be David the teeth? He'd tried to bite my ears once. 'I know, Peter Whats-it?' 'Who?' Sheila said. 'You know, the zoology student'. 'Oh, the fella who's always scratching his....?' 'Yes, that's him' I said.

'I thought he was engaged to that girl Bonnie...the one who keeps pet jellyfish?'

'No. One stung him when he tried to stroke it, he whacked it one. she cried and threw him out, broke off their engagement - so he went off and joined those Monks in Wiltshire'

'He's out of harms way anyway'. Sheila said. Yes. Who then?'

'Patrick Vance. You met him once at the Jazz Club'. 'He was very nice' I said.

'And very interested in you. I've lined him up for an interview tomorrow night'. Thursday?' I must have sounded doubtful. 'Yes, what's wrong?'

'I can't do it Thursday. It's my darts night'.

Sheila sounded put out. 'Come on Babe, you can't mean that?'

'I can't let them down. You'll just have to set up the interviews for Friday night'.

'You'll have to forgo Patrick' Sheila reminded me 'he goes to Horror Comic-Club meetings on Fridays'.

'Oh, yes, his Mum once told me he had over ten thousand comics stacked in his sister's bedroom'.

'Not much room for his sister then?'

'No' I said 'they had to board her out. No room left for her bed'.

Sheila shrugged. 'Well, I hope you're going to be an artist that plays darts and not a dart player that paints.

Best of luck. Call me Friday. confirm the interviews, I'll get some chaps along".

'Goodnight Sheila, and thanks for all your help'.

Sheila left. I listened to her footsteps fade away. I was on my own. I sat on the bed. After some moments of feeling melancholy, I got up and went to the fridge, trying not to think of being alone in Bohemia. I deposited my groceries in the fridge. Inside there was a bottle of Gin. Where had it come from? A gift from Mr Marriott? No, Sheila. That was more like it. She must have sneaked it in as a surprise. In the salad compartment were a few bottles of tonic water. I opened the Gin - poured a drink, and sat back on the bed. I looked

first at the Calendar girl, then at the Print of the Ghostly Galleon tossing on a turbulent sea. Soon I'd replace them with my own work. I wondered where the best place would be for my drawing table. My gaze drifted slowly over the walls and ceiling, noticing for the first time the damp marks and rough plaster, the holes and the grease stains. I got up and picked at a lump of paint and when it fell off it left a hole in the plaster. I sat back and finished my drink, quietly listening. Something - perhaps an animal - scratched between the eaves. Suddenly there was the sound of two radios - each turning the others words into garble. Voices. Elvis breaking in with 'Now or Never' Plumbing sounds recurred with such amazing regularity that I wondered if a battalion of girl guides had stopped by to use the facilities. A woman's laughter rose and fell. Someone started to play a guitar and a cowboy kind of voice tried to carry a tune. A man shouted 'T'VE HAD YOU UP TO HERE' and a door slammed. A winter thump rattled the walls. I sat listening, wanting the voices to be my friends. I lay on the bed. Voices murmuring. A woman's voice. I got off the bed - put my ear to the floor. 'Yes' said the voice 'first I gave him the bit of chocolate cake out of my mouth and it was leap year like now, yes sixteen years ago....my God after that long kiss I near lost my breath.....'Sounded like Molly Bloom's soliloquy. I'd read James Joyce in my last year at University when I should have been reading 'Middlemarch'. Then before I got sentimental, I thought I'd better finish unpacking. I found some space for my clothes, books, and my drawings.

Another Gin forced me to venture down to the second-floor toilet. Luckily it wasn't occupied. Once inside, I tried to lock the door but found that the lock didn't meet its slot in the wood. I looked down and saw that the toilet bowl was old-fashioned and rusty. I put down the wooden seat and it fell off the bowl-rim with a crash. In desperation, I sat on the rim of the bowl, and held the door closed with my left knee and one outstretched hand. On the wall was written 'If I were a castaway - on the plains of Timbuktu - I would eat a Missionary - Cassock, bands, and hymn-book too'. When I flushed the toilet, the water rose dangerously close to the brim and wouldn't go down. A plunger stood beside the bowl as if it was a necessary part of the operation. I used it and, miraculously, the water burped and receded. I paused in the hall to glance at each door. There seemed to be more laughter now, much of it male. No one came out. I went back to my room.

Once I'd had another Gin and tonic. I moved the suitcase to the floor and undressed and got into bed in my underclothes. My childhood, my years of school and University, and my brief legal career all passed before me. I thought about everyone I had ever known. Soon I realised the radios were silent and the voices had vanished. Sounds of the outside door closing and bottles clinking and feet shuffling reached me but then there were no more.

I thought of Brian. Where was he now? Traditional as he might be, I liked him. I could be with him now, snogging in his room while his parents watched TV below us. As hard as I could, I tried to remember his hair, and the taste of his mouth. I must not get sentimental. I turned out the bedside

light. The blanket was itchy. I'd forgotten sheets. Alone -surrounded by strangers. What about Cockroaches? Spiders? Mice? Sleepwalkers? Killers? Arsonists? Maniacs? Oh God! What kind of unsavoury characters was I living with? Was the room filled with agile Vampires perching on the skylight and peering at me. Tarantulas swinging onto the bed like hairy Tarzan's - and Scorpions poised like artillery in the corners. I was already beginning to find out that an artists life is lonely. You can't share painting with anyone. You create alone. I knew what a lonely life I'd chosen. Heart racing, eyes wide, I held firm to the mattress until morning noises sneaked into the room. As dawn arrived, a radio blared a familiar tune. I fell asleep to Eartha Kill's rendition of 'Santa Baby'.

Chapter 10.

The Plough shimmered with warmth, bright lights and the smell of crisps and beer. Three men were playing darts and I was the first of our team to arrive. I waved to the barman, hung my coat on the back of a chair and sat down to marvel at the vastness of this establishment, with its four bars, the juke-box and the fruit machines.

I had slept most of the day. About 2.30, Mr Marriott sent a deliveryman up to me with my drawing table. That set me moving. I had prunes, bread and butter and coffee, realizing that toast was well nigh impossible without a toaster. Later, in Debenham's store, I bought a toaster, two sheets and a pillow. From Debenham's I went to a small cafe that

specialized in fishcakes. Back in my attic, I set up my board under the skylight and taped a fresh piece of paper onto it. I sat at the board, staring at the paper until it was time to go to the darts match.

Minutes before eight, the players arrived at the "Plough". Funny things about pubs - in the day they have an air of masculinity, but in the evening they become more feminine. Must be the little bowls of nuts and crisps they leave on the bar.

'Hi Joan'

'Hello there Winnie'

'How's the leg, Phyllis?'

'Hello Nettie'.

'Hi, Sam'.

'Evening Nell'.

'How are you?'

'Hello Maureen'.

'Greetings and hallucinations'.

'Good Evening Glyn'.

'There's Claudia'. Did you know she's engaged, again?'

'Hello Marie'.

'Did you bring any pot, Vi?'

'Betty, you'll never guess what happened to Jamie's new puppy'.

'Are we on the old dartboard again this week?'

'Not a bad night out the other week'.

'Hello, hello, hello'

'Ah, she's here! Sandra. How did you make it so early'.

'Hi there, Georgy Girl'

'Don't expect anything much from me tonight, I put my back out'

'Oh, yes - how'd you do that then. Bit of the naughties?'

'Ha, ha - very funny'

'Is this the night we win the magnum of champers?'

They thronged into the pub, taking off coats, scarves and sweaters, standing on one leg to put on sensible shoes for darts, the less agile sitting wherever they could to put on theirs. Teams were identified by their matching shirts.

Our team was white with red trim, the red letters on the back spelling out our sponsor's name "THE PLOUGH" over the breast pocket of mine, written in red embroidery was "Babe". Players had no excuse for forgetting names.

My team got nearest the Bull, so started off first. I was last to throw. Three others proceeded me. From my seat by the scoreboard, I watched Moira wipe her hands on her towel and go into her classic delivery, her left foot turning within one inch of the throwing line, the other foot sticking out behind her like Mercury's. She got a double four to start - she followed it with sixteen and a five. I got excited by this. I jumped up, took a swig of lager, and practiced my throwing movement. I took up my place just off the mat, I concentrated on the board.

My first dart hit the board and dropped to the floor. Sounds of disappointment from my team. Blushing, I aimed for a double twenty -'Eureka' my last dart got me a double eight. Not too bad.

Playing darts turned my mind to Brian, so much so that I didn't worry about the game, and before I knew it my second turn had scored one twenty-four. No one asked me about my personal life and I didn't talk about it - I just enjoyed being there with everyone. No one even commented on the obvious fact that I wasn't wearing make-up. I led off my third turn with a triple twenty, then a double nine. Jan the dart-league secretary, checked my score and remarked -'Not pining for Brian, I see'.

I threw my last dart - a triple nine - my team-mates applauded, one even slapped me on the back as I sat down, and looked at the chalked scoreboard. When I went up next time, I took extra care, not because I wanted to concentrate extra hard but because I was afraid I'd let the side down. After a series of good scores, a player can do something foolish like missing the board altogether. I threw the dart. Double eight. The next -ten. My third hit the twenty. Another good score. My team cheered. Even the team we were playing against started to pay attention. I barely noticed the wet kisses or the hard slap as I sat down.

By now, the pub customers were coming over to watch, as they always do when there's a player on form. I don't know if they're vultures who want to watch the poor

player's first miss or if they truly want, deep down, to see them throw a high score. But seeing them moving over makes you extra-conscious of what you're doing. You hear your team-mates saying 'Go on, keep throwing normal' It's like cricket when a batsman is on his way to a century. It's bad luck to mention the possibility too early in the game.

I scratched my cheek. I felt self-conscious about the lack of make-up. I wish I'd put some on. But I had to get started on my new life somehow. Why did I have to have this excitement now? I wanted to be a recluse in a garret and suddenly everyone was watching me. By the time it was my throw again I was almost mesmerized, I stepped up to the mat. Taking my upright stance, I rotated my shoulders to loosen them up. I fidgeted the way a top player does, checking my shoes to be sure I hadn't stepped in anybody's spilled beer. I heard 'Take your time, Babe, lots' a time, take your time, Babe.....'

I threw double eight. Next a six, and then a nine. Everyone cheered. I grinned and shrugged as I walked into the midst of the little crowd to sit down. Several players gave me encouraging pats. All I could think of was, why tonight? Another part of me loved the attention. It was the kind of attention that I hoped to get as an artist. Besides, I told myself, there are countless players who

miss a perfect game in the crucial last throw. Everyone was hushed, except for Sandra who kept up her chatter 'you can do it kid, come on, girl, come on now, Zing them darts' and a few others who nervously wanted to pretend it was business as usual for my benefit. As I stepped up for what could be the final throw, my heart was crashing through my chest. For some reason their team captain said 'are you sure you're a darts player?' this said with a smirk to put me off. I slipped a little on the wet mat but held myself back, a fraction of an inch off the foul line. The dart hit the bulls-eye. The crowd roared. It was my first bull. I had to throw two more darts. I almost forgot to get kissed and slapped. I executed a smooth action and added a little extra follow-through. Double twenty!

When you have a string going, you can usually throw pretty automatically, but nervousness gets to you and you usually snap or jerk your arm - perhaps out of panic or maybe out of just plain fear of missing the board altogether. Everyone else was finished. I was the last player - get the last dart in the inner - and we'd won. Everyone was gathered around. I felt horrible. I was sick with anticipation and nervousness and wildly oscillating thoughts. I didn't want to throw a perfect dart because artists just don't do those things and yet it was ridiculous to be this close and not want to finish the job. I wished with all my heart I didn't have to throw that last dart. Mechanically, likely seeming calm to all outward appearances, I lined myself up. I got set. I moved forward. Everyone was quiet. All I could hear was the rattle of beer glasses. Someone screamed as I let the dart go. That arrow went true to in the inner bull and I couldn't believe it. 'It's in!' someone cried. The voices of the crowd lifted in one loud 'Hooray!' and people rushed at me and all I could think of amidst the kisses and the handshakes was, I want to run out of here and tell Brian and I want to tell my parents - but I can't. 'Hold it, don't go anywhere!' the barman yelled at me as he reached for his telephone.

'I might be able to get the local press photographer down here, right away'.

Chapter 11.

'What on earth is your face doing on the sports page of our local rag?' Sheila said.

'What on earth are you doing reading the sports page?' I wanted to know.

It was five p.m. Thursday when Sheila phoned and I had been at my drawing-board, staring at the score sheet for our winning match. It was signed by the publican. My head was throbbing with a hangover - a few of the girls had taken me to Viv's to celebrate our game and I had lost count of the glasses of red wine I drank, but I know that someone - I think it was Mary Parley, a white-haired widow with a peculiar left-arm throw - picked up some Black Label from an off-licence. I got so drunk that they dared me to phone Brian and Idid. The call woke him up. He wasn't mad but he wouldn't come over either. I think he might have if it hadn't been for the giggling in the background. I think he heard one of them say 'Gang Bang' and that put him off.

There's no doubt about it, I enjoyed the company of those girls. Even if I hadn't thrown the perfect dart, I'd have been glad of an excuse to get out with the gang. I was already beginning to find out that an artist's life is lonely. You can't share drawing with anyone. You create alone. I hadn't drawn a thing in my new surroundings and yet I already knew what a lonely life I'd chosen. Sheila phoned.

'How can the city's newest darts star have any credibility as an artist?' Sheila asked.

'Art lovers don't read darts write-ups' I countered.

'Babe, I can't reconcile one with the other. If you're serious about art, you've got to give up darts. This cheap notoriety could harm you'.

'Sheila, it was the perfect game. Like a century in cricket, a hole-in-one in golf. It's the thrill of a lifetime!'

There was a silence of nearly half a minute. Then Sheila spoke.

'For some strange reason, I have lined up three young men to be interviewed by you tonight. All have expressed an interest in moving in with you as your model! Not as your darts trainer!'

Her voice hurt my ear. I looked around to see if anyone had heard her. A second floor door slammed. Mr Marriott was descending at the rate of one step an hour. But Sheila had a right to be angry. I'd forgotten that we had planned the interviews for that night.

'Say no more' I said. 'I need a model far more than a darts game. What time are they due?'

'One at eight o'clock, the second at eight forty-five, and the third at nine thirty. Oh, and Babe, try to get one out before the next arrives. I've explained to all three how to find your house. I hope you see one you like'.

'I'm sure I will, I really appreciate your efforts Sheila'

'Do me one favour. Before they arrive, hide that darts trophy'.

'Until find a more suitable place for it' I told Sheila. She rang off.

I was beginning to have doubts about interviewing. I'd done it once before at the University Sketch Club. Seeing sixteen and seventeen year olds who might be suitable as models. Most were scrawny, introverted, caught up in private mythologies, many exhibited a fierce, hostile intelligence. They all seemed to have great assurance about their absence of conviction. They were not eager to please, and they lacked charm. They were disturbing, making me ill at ease. They did not connect with anything in my experience. Not one of them had innocence, or the openness and physical presence I was looking for. It was a chilling thing, to see iron in such young souls. I was only eighteen myself at the time, but felt ninety-eight. After bacon and eggs at a greasy spoon on Station Road, I giddily returned to my room. I nodded to a chap on the stairs but he seemed too preoccupied to acknowledge me. His ski-hat was pulled down over his eyes. I had no way of knowing if it was a tenant.

I arranged the kitchen table and chairs in the centre of the room, at right angles to the bed. I set one chair behind the table - one at the side. Good interviewers never sat the interviewee across the desk from them because it was psychologically bad. The table would act as a barrier. I wiped off the table. To cut down the formality, I scattered a few magazines on the table, two of them half covering the notepad I was going to write on. Placed cigarettes on the table, an ash tray. Interviewers always offered cigarettes to put applicants at ease. Applicants for sales jobs were usually turned down if they coughed while smoking or held the cigarette in the air - or smoked it down too close to the end or blew smoke at the interviewer. I think a lot of companies had turned me down because I had said 'No thank you, I don't smoke'. I sharpened two pencils and let them lie any old way on the pad. I carefully placed an Art book illustrated with Michelangelo

paintings on the bed. It gave the place an aura of classy sensuality. I put the silver-plated trophy in the fridge. A few minutes after eight the first applicant arrived. He was short and on the plump side but his face was quite acceptable.

'Good Evening' he said, smiling.

He was six minutes late, I wrote 'late' on the note-pad. His name was Tim Ball. Trying to sound authoritative, I asked him to be seated.

'Cold night, eh?' I remarked. The important thing in interview technique is that you should always break the ice with pleasantries.

'Yes' said Tim 'it is cold - I'm glad I wore two vests'.

'Quite' I said, somewhat puzzled.

'I am Tim Ball, you are..' I didn't answer. 'What is your name please?' he asked me again.

'Babe'.

'Ah, don't you have a?'

'I never use it' I told him.

'That's odd' he said.

'Never underestimate the stimulation of eccentricity' I told him.

'Oh, I'd never do that'.

'Now, you are applying for the position of model, is that correct?'

He nodded looking at my knees.

I pulled at the hem of my skirt 'Now, I want it made clear

that as an artist I am attempting to follow the good classical tradition of artist-model relationship'. 'Oh, yes' he smirked 'I saw Moulin Rouge'. 'Did you? Well, It is important that the applicant be told all the conditions of the work. You will not be paid much at first, your living may be quite uncomfortable for the first few weeks, until I sell something' I pushed the cigarettes towards him. 'Smoke?'

'Thank you.....no..' 'Do you mind if I do?' 'No, go right ahead'.

I lit the wrong end of a cigarette. Coughed. 'What is your present job, if any?' 'Me? I'm a Waiter. I wait on tables'.

'Would you defend that occupation to the death?' I asked. He looked perplexed. 'No. I suppose not. No, I wouldn't'. 'Good' I doodled on my pad. 'If we...and I use the corporate we...if we select you. will you leave your present job?' 'I suppose' he replied.

'Suppose?....why?' 'I have to stand up all day'.

'Do you realise' I said 'you might have to do a lot of standing as a model?' 'I suppose so'.

'Well do you think you'd like the life of an artists model Tim?' He leered 'I'd like a change'. 'I see. What type of upbringing have you had?'

'I haven't been sick since the day I ate a pound of green plums at my Grannies'.

'Sorry' I said 'I'm not with you'.

'No, you weren't'.

I wasn't dealing with Einstein here. 'No, how were you brought up.....er...raised?'

'You mean like in Poker?'

'No' I said with a sigh 'let me put it another way. Did your parents love you?'

'Oh yes. My Dad used to lend me his toy soldiers. He'd also save some of his beer and sneak me a swig when my mother

wasn't looking. He used to slap me now and again, but we got along alright, well, when it mattered. Like, for instance when I was going somewhere special, he'd let me wear his Crombie overcoat'.

I was reminded that our mind is a genetic disease passed on by our parents.

'You enjoyed life with your parents then?'

'Oh. yes. My father also taught me poker...and blackjack'.

'What do you think of promiscuity?' I asked him.

'What?'

'You know, promiscuity?'

'Ah. I never make promises I can't keep'.

I became impatient. 'Promiscuity....means...sleeping around. What do you think of sleeping around?'

'Sleeping around what?' he said 'Around the clock? I couldn't do that. I am not a lazy person, even when I've been out late the night before.....!.....'

I thought I ought to move on. 'Do you drink?'

'Like a fish'.

'But you don't smoke?'

'Only when I'm alone, takes my mind off the dark'. He glanced up at the skylight.

We both laughed. I tried again.

'One final question, would you have enough patience to model for a painting?'

'It depends what you're painting'.

'I suppose it does. One other thing, do you snore?'

'Oh no' Tim said with the kind of tone he might have used if I'd asked if he picked his toes:

Without edge I said 'That's good. Okay, we'll be in touch with you'.

'Terrific'

I asked if there was anything he wished to say to me?

'Only one thing. I'm married, but my poor wife drowned last summer. It was a week after she'd fallen in a bed of stinging nettles'.

I did not laugh, but said 'At least she didn't have to suffer with all that itching anymore'.

'Exactly' said Tim. He rose from the table. 'Well, thank you. Goodnight'.

'Goodnight' I said. He left.

I recovered from Tim in time for the second applicant, who arrived five minutes early - a radiant James Hickey. He'd styled his hair a la Tony Curtis, circa 1960, and wore a shirt with 'Hollywood' stitched on the breast pocket. Hello James' I said 'good to see you. How are you?' 'Very prescient, thank you. I had the feeling I'd get here early, and I did. I visualised two flights of stairs, and sure enough, there were. I even imagined there'd be a skylight, facing north...' 'And there is'.

'Now I have a feeling, that I am going to be chosen for this position'.

'I like the shirt' I said. 'Thank you....er...Miss..er...?'

'Babe. Won't you sit down.'" 'I will'.

'What is your full name?' 'James Fit/eilbert R.

Hickey'. 'What does the R stand for?' 'I don't know'

"Why's that' I asked him.

My birth certificate had ink blots on it. I thought one of the stains looked like an 'R', so I took the initial for myself. But have never decided what name beginning with 'R' suited me, so I left it'.

As long as it wasn't going to turn out to be 'R' for Rat, I didn't care.

"My family dates back to the old Saxon king's of Britain'. There wasn't much I could say to that, was there? 'Yes, I see' I said 'You know of course, what the position of live-in model entails?'

'It conjures up all sorts of visions, not the least of which is one of infinite bliss, helping you achieve the stature of a famous and important artist. And I can't think of a more fitting setting than this wonderful old garret. Such a marvellous skylight'.

I asked him if he'd care for a cigarette? He nodded, then took out a cigarette-holder from his pocket and expertly fitted the cigarette into it. I lit a match and held it for him, then fired my own cigarette. I took one drag, and placed it on the saucer I was using for an ashtray.

'You feel then' I said 'that you would be doing the correct thing if you quit society to become, in effect our.....well my lover?'

'Certainly. In my most recent communication with the spirits, I was encouraged to act freely. I am sure that the spirits mean us to do what we truly believe in'.

'I'm sure they do' I said.

'Just last week, when I spoke with my Aunt, she told me life was too short to spend it bottling up all our primary needs and emotions. I felt that someday I should be an artists model and lover, therefore I will be'.

The look on his face was like a sexy milkman who was successfully blackmailing a suburban housewife. 'Do you have any interest in art' I asked him.

'I love people who draw. I think it would be so satisfying to have a talent like that. I've heard it said that York needs more culture. I am very much in favour of doing anything to help the Arts'. He gave me the kind of smile that I imagine suburban husbands give their wives when they wanted to start a family. I squirmed. 'What type of upbringing, I mean childhood did you have?'

'Wonderfully happy' he told me 'Not only did my parents look after my food, clothing and shelter, but they also gave me most of my education in the birds and bees, reincarnation, clairvoyance, and supernatural theory. They even paid my way through college'.

'You went to college then'

'Oh yes' he said.

'Where?' I asked him.

'Just College'.

I dropped the subject 'What is your present job?' I asked.

'I am a Chef. School Dinners. Primary school. Naturally if I become your model and lover, I'd continue on with my job to help support you until you are well established'.

Well, that sounded a terrific idea. 'Now, do you have any habits you might call bad?'

'I smoke a bit, as you can see, and occasionally I swear, but nothing worse than damn or hell. Sometimes I feel intense concentration coming over me, like a trance, and I have to sit perfectly still. That usually precedes any spiritual communication. And I like fondling, both inside and outside the clothing, above and below the waist. I know it's a throwback to my adolescence, when my mother told me that fondling was essential to cheer a girl up. Woman are sometimes such taciturn creatures, a little fondling here and there seems to break down their inhibitions and gets at their true natures. I've noticed it so often, before we kissed and felt each other, girls I knew were always on edge, but after fondling, they relaxed and talked freely'.

There was no answer to that, so I said 'I see. Well, do you feel you have the grace and poise it takes to be a satisfactory model?'

'Yes. One winter I went to a lady who taught me charm and deportment. I got so good at carrying books on my head, that the teacher said, 'You must take up Yoga' So I did. My yoga teacher said she could get me on the BBC.

'Radio?' I said with an innocent smile.

'No, no, radio would be no good. Television.' But I was more interested in mystical things than Show Business. But she taught me everything she knew about my body. She was very interested in me. We used to fondle quite a lot'. 'It's important for my work that you have no outside romantic obligations' I said 'are you still involved with her?'

'No. She was an eccentric person. She used to visit the Railway Station, and watch the trains come and go. She said it made her sexually excited. She visited the Railway

Museum at Swindon last year, got aboard the fireman's platform of a 1923 locomotive, became so aroused, she threw herself under a diesel - a 1947 model - it was moving quite fast at the time. I've tried to get in touch with her ever since, but I don't think she's speaking to me. It's all over between us'

'Do you honestly believe that you can speak with the dead?'

'Of course' said James.

I looked at him with wide eyes. For such a dish, he had a strange mind.

'I think that will be all. I'll be in touch soon'.

'Goodnight' James said.

He leaned over and kissed me on the cheek. In one fluid movement, he grabbed his overcoat and left.

What the hell! I'd got some strange quirks too. We'd get to know each other soon enough if he was the one I choose. It was only five minutes later that a slim young man with severe features arrived.

'Your name?' I said, trying to sound officious.

'Bernard Hart. Like a smoke?'

'Um....er...no thanks' I said 'but you go ahead'.

'Sure?'

'Yes. quite sure. Your occupation?'

'Registered Nurse

I concentrated on my writing-pad.' You are interested in being a model?'

'And live-in lover?'

'Why?' I asked him

'I want the security of a woman's arms'.

'How old are you ?'

He paused for a moment then said 'Twenty-seven'.

'Have you had many girlfriends?'

'Hundreds. I'd say. But they were all just a brief fling. I need security'

'Do you think being a model and live-in lover is secure?'

'Oh yes' Bernard said 'you hear of women leaving their husbands every day. People changing partners faster than they do at a whist drive. There's a certain strange quality that goes with the status of husband or wife. After the honeymoon, you have to practically ignore your spouse, that's expected up here. You can flirt with her friends at parties, but it's taboo to fondle your own wife. It's wrong to have fun with her. So where does she go for comfort? To her lover of course. An aura of intrigue surrounds a lover and keeps a woman in love with him. Maybe it's because our society doesn't publicly condone lovers'.

'Surely the lover gets to be like a husband if a girl lives with him long enough?'

That floored him for a moment, then he said 'Perhaps so, but Sheila told me you were young and healthy, and if there's anything I need right now, it's a young healthy girl. You know what I see every day? Sick women, crippled girls, deaf girls, old girls. I've seen hundreds of them in my duties as a registered nurse, waiting to be fed, washed, or crying for their bottles like babies - moaning for the pain to go away. I can't stand that life any longer'.

He leapt to his feet.

'No wait' I said.

'It's driving me mad, I need a girl, a healthy girl'.

He grabbed hold of me. 'Hey' I yelled.

'You healthy girl, you. Let me carry you off.

Let me drag you into my cave, tear off your clothes. Please let me be yours, and you be mine'.

'But this is only an interview, Bernard' I said.

He crushed me against his shallow chest. I struggled to my feet. He attacked me with an active mouth. He kissed my face, neck....and a couple of popped buttons later - my shoulder.

He held me in the kind of grip that a drowning man might use on his rescuer. One of his legs wound around one of mine. He tried to throw me to the floor.

'This is not the way to conduct an interview' I yelled. We fell on the floor. Bernard pushed himself into an upright position pinning me to the floor. I struggled to the window. 'Is that your car?' I said.

'I'm not telling, you tigress you'. He ran his tongue along the inside edge of my left ear, as I plucked the car keys from his pocket. With a mighty heave I got him to the door. We half-fell, half-ran, sideways and frontward's and backwards, down the stairs. On the second floor a chap with red hair appeared in a doorway. A studious looking man wearing a kimono threw open his door. They just stood and watched us as if they saw this kind of thing every day. James continued to push himself against me as we lurched outside. Despite not wearing a coat, I didn't feel the cold. 'I'll drive you home' I told him. 'Where do you live?' 'I'm not telling you'.

I managed to get him downstairs. I pushed him in the passenger seat. I got the car started and drove away. I'd never driven anything more than a motor-scooter, but that night I drove like Emerson Fita-flaming-Paldi. How? I've no idea, but I did. As we went along - Bernie-boy tried to feel my boobs.

Vulnerable as I was in the drivers seat, I managed to manoeuvre that car through the streets. Bernard's biting, rubbing and licking, turned the heads of passing motorists. I had to drive with the added handicap of tremendous embarrassment. It didn't matter that he wouldn't tell me where he lived. I didn't intending taking him there anyway. He'd made a mockery of the interview. He kept up the attack, tugging at my skirt - until I stopped the car. He glanced up to see where we were. That gave me a chance to jump out, run around the other side to open the door and haul him out. I rushed him through the doors marked 'Hospital-Emergency' I had the strength of ten Sumo Wrestlers by this time. I delivered him into the care of two startled - and healthy nurses, and ran off down the corridor. I returned - via taxi - from the hospital. In that cold damp garret, I fell asleep with a smile on my face.

Chapter 11.

All three men had something to offer. The first had that odd combination of naivety and experience. The second had a nice face and a thinking mind that, after all, did appreciate art. The last had that raw, wild quality. But the choice seemed easy to make.

Next morning, on the hall pay-phone I spoke to Sheila, my hand muffling my voice from any eavesdropping tenants. 'The interviews went really well' I told her. 'Darts, wasn't mentioned once. Where did you ever find that Bernard?'

'I met him last year when I was in Hospital for an appendix operation. He used to bring me the bed-pan. And if I was very lucky, he'd give me a blanket bath'

'You should write a book' I said 'But he's something, yes?'

'Yeah, he's top-of-the pops. Have you made a choice?'

'It has to be James Hickey' I said 'He's the best looking'.

'That's great! I'll let him know. When do you want him to start?'

'Tomorrow'.

She sighed. "Tomorrow? You sure you can handle him?'

'Yeah. See you soon then?'

'Hold on' Sheila said 'look Babe....don't worry about contraception. I'll take care of that for you.'

'How?'

She laughed again. 'Don't ask too many questions'. I heard the telephone click down.

I spent all day in my room, jumpily moving from corner to corner trying to decide which angle I should draw from. I could picture James standing there under light, at last my life was taking that illicit turn I'd always longed for. I wondered what everybody would be doing in his little York world. Dad making four-hundred more elastic stockings on his big black machine. Mr Dixon snarling at my replacement. Mr. Downing lecturing to an empty classroom or reading a life of Joshua Reynolds to a sleeping Gauguin.

I didn't know if I'd have to explain James to Mr. Marriott. I hadn't seen any of the other tenants bringing lovers in, but this was the kind of neighbourhood where these things went on, besides I didn't know who lived here and who didn't. The two chaps who showed their faces during the Bernard Hart fiasco didn't seem too alarmed. They likely wouldn't mind -though Mr. Marriott might demand more rent if he knew James was staying. Maybe I would end up smuggling him in 'Piggyback' style. What to actually do with James, occupied my mind. This was long before 'How to manage your sex life' were in the bookshops. I found myself turning to my John Donne textbook for help. I tried to find some instructive lines in the elegy 'On his Mistris' but the 17th century language got in the way. I'd lost full understanding of it the day I received my B.A.

Another of his elegies 'To His Mistris going to bed' seemed more useful, though it appeared to deal more with undressing than with what to do after you were undressed. After reading both poems several times, I decided that this was going to be one examination I couldn't study for - in matters of this sort, nature would be a more reliable guide. I had a bath in lukewarm water - the Marriott water was seldom hot. I checked in the mirror whether or not to shave my legs. I decided not! It mattered that I wear my best though, on this night of nights. It's a strange feeling you have when you're embarking on your first lover.

You think such things as - what he'll wear in bed, whether he'll notice the pimple on your bum, whether he brushes his teeth before coming to bed, what position he prefers to sleep in, and how he'll look in the mornings. And if you're going to be able to stand sharing a room with a man. You wonder if having him there is going to be all right with the police - or the church - or the local council - it's bound it be contravening some law. I didn't want to dwell on all that. As I prepared to welcome James to my artists garret, I thought how simple the interviews had made the acquiring of a male companion. All the wooing -spending money on make-up and clothes - and being eternally nice - all that skipped! Funny, how deciding on the bohemian life had brought the men frothing to my door - ready to pose for me, cook for me - sleep with me, with not a word about weddings or bridesmaids! I gave myself the old once-over in the mirror. I sneered at myself - sexily.

Chapter 12.

We met on the corner of Fossgate and Walmgate. The cold, blustery wind sweep us into a nearby cafe. We set down James's suitcase by the door. We sat at a corner table. The waitress came over, we laughed and elbowed each other, self consciously trying to show her that we weren't self-conscious, perhaps just a little eccentric.

'The wind is howling but I'm as warm as toast' James warbled. We ate toasted cheese sandwiches. Following coffee, we ventured into the night, giddily leaning on each other. In the taxi, we snuggled together, touching foreheads and giggling.

'Doesn't it seem funny' James said 'that on our first date we're both going home to the same room?'

That caused the cab-driver to watch us in his rear-view mirror more than he watched the road. He grinned at James meaningfully when he paid him and gave him an extra-large tip. I hustled James into the Marriott hideaway. The old man lay snoring in the living room. James and I both collided with walls and tripped on steps in our efforts to be too quiet, but I don't think anyone heard us. 73

We could hear noises in the rooms but no one came out. Once in the studio, I hung up our coats and threw a few stray articles into drawers. I had been too excited to notice them before. I put James's suitcase next to one end of the bed. James sat on a chair, then on the bed, then on the chair again. Trying to appear nonchalant, I put on an indifferent face as if I had men in my garret every day of the week. "Some Enchanted Evening" by Mantovani and his orchestra, played in my head. I must have looked a bit embarrassed, we both laughed - a little self-consciously.

'I'm really glad you applied for the job, James' I said.

'Yes, so am I'.

'Yes. Doesn't it seem funny to have our first date in your flat? It usually takes two or three outings to achieve that prize 'Does it? I've never thought about it'.

'Do you think anyone heard us on the stairs?' James asked me.

'I shouldn't think so' I replied 'Too much noise in the other rooms'

'I've read about this situation in novels' he said gravely.

'Oh, yeah....the northern novel - Stan Barstow, John Braine....'Kind of Loving' and all that..eh?'

'Mmmmmmm' James replied.

'Most Northern novelists have the gift of beautifying the truth for the unimaginative, don't you think?'

'Yes' said James 'We Northerners are naturally suspicious of successful love affairs, believing that there is more of the eternal in unsuccessful ones. Do you have anything to drink?'

'Er....I'll get you one'.

'That's great' James said, then picked up a book that was lying around. 'What did you think of this?' he asked me.

'What?'

'Catcher in the Rye'.

'Great. People keep stealing it, and I keep buying new copies, I haven't opened that one yet. I don't want to decrease its value'. 'Ah' he put the book down.

'I should have made cocktails, but I haven't a cocktail shaker. I suppose I could use the jar that I keep my toothbrush in?'

James didn't hear, he was looking at another book.

'I'll see you in a minute' I said. I went down to the second floor to wash out the jar. I was about to enter the landing bathroom when flushing preceded the opening of the toilet door and the chap with red hair came out. 'Activity night up there again, eh?' said the man.

I went puce and blurted out 'He's my cousin' I blushed and re-entered my room.

Back in the studio James looked up from a book " Lust for Life" and said 'You have a lot books about painters don't you?'

'Yes' I answered 'I've always said that the two greatest influences on my life were Vincent Van Gogh and Elvis'. He carried on looking at my books, whilst I attempted a cocktail. I mixed ice cubes, sherry, sweet vermouth in the empty jam-jar. As I didn't have glasses I poured the mixture into cups. I took his drink over to him.

'Sorry, no cherry' I said giving him his drink.

'Likewise, darling' he said, smiling broadly and looking me straight in the eye. I shivered.

We clinked cups and drank. James got up and went to my drawing-board.

'Let's see some of your work.' James said. 'I haven't done any since I got here, I've been waiting for a model. A model like you'.

James leered at me 'That's nice. I think I'm going to like it here'.

I crossed to the bed, sat down, James joined me. 'Good cocktail?' I asked him.

'Very. What do you call it?'

'A nine-ten' I told him.

'Why?'

'It knocks you out' I laughed long and hard at my own joke.

James looked puzzled. 'Eh?'

'Nine - ten - Out! Get it?'

T see. Drink up and I'll make the next one'.

I finished my drink. James got up.

Tee cubes are loose in the tray' I told him.

James opened the fridge. Lifted out my trophy. 'What's this?'

'Eh?' I pretended not to care, and fixed my gaze on a damp spot on the ceiling.

He was waving it about in the air. 'This?'

'It's my one and only trophy'.

'What's it doing in the fridge?'

Trying to be casual I said 'They say it's good for the silver, keeps it cold. It sort of looks good in there against the milk bottle, don't you think?'

'My own opinion is that you can't afford the time for .drama, Babe. You've got to give yourself to your art. But then, that is only my opinion and you are free to do as you see fit'.

Thanks' I said.

He brought the drinks over. Handed me one.

After an embarrassed pause, I spoke 'I think the sky's clear

now. We might be able to see the stars if I turn out the light'

James whispered 'Yes, do'.

I flicked the light off, and stumbled back to James. He reached for my hand.

'Babe....you're freezing?' He said. He then put his arm around me.

I thought, here we go - overture and beginners please.

Suddenly James began to sway. His mouth quivered and a low moan came out of his mouth. 'Table - oh - table!'

I jumped up in alarm.

He spoke again 'Table if you understand me, knock three times'. Nervously, I watched the table.

'Oh Table! Oh Table! To prove that I have made contact with the other world, knock three times'.

I watched in terror. I was pretty upset. What was this? I didn't know if the table moved or not. I watched it and I thought I heard three distinct thuds, but I'm sure I didn't see it move.

"Auntie, Auntie, can you hear me?" howled James. His eyes fixed on the skylight. 'Auntie, please answer me, can you hear me?'

There was no reply, only a radio elsewhere in the house.

'Oh, Auntie, how are you? Oh, that's good. Why did you take so long to answer? Oh, my, my...we never get rid of life's little nuisances do we?'

'James' I whispered 'No one is answering you'.

'Oh, yes Auntie, I must tell you' James rambled on in the shadows 'You know how I've had that urge to have a mistress? Well I finally got the opportunity.....and now I'm living with a real artist. I am going to be her model. Imagine, your little nephew, a model, isn't it fantastic?'. I moved closer to the door, all this was a bit bloody peculiar.

'Auntie, would you like to speak to my artist friend? Of course you would.

Well, she's a little shy, but she's very nice - Oh, dear, she's gone out of the room just now, but she'll.....'

That was the last I heard as I beat a hasty retreat, and hurried down the stairs.

Perhaps the night air would clear my mind. I hunched up in my coat. The usually hostile darkness of the street embraced me like the arms of a friend. Of all the lovers in all the garrets in the world, I had to get one who spoke with the dead! I was getting angry about the whole thing - more angry than scared. No matter how good-looking he wa[^]. he was not going to take over my studio for his séances. And I did not intend to paint him in one of his trances - no matter how still he sat! Clenching my fists, I headed back to the house with a single purpose - to toss that weird bugger out on his ear.

When I got back to Marriott's, I crept up to the garret door, thinking that if he was still entranced, I'd burst in and break the spell. I heard nothing. Opening the door a crack, I peeked inside. I couldn't see him. Had he left? Or had he vanished into the twilight zone? Heart pounding, I swallowed hard, threw open the door and flicked on the light.

James lay in my bed, asleep. 'James' I said, not too loudly, but loud enough. I couldn't believe anyone could have the nerve. I threw back the bedclothes. He was dressed in my blue housecoat, and red bed-socks.

'James wake-up' I screamed. I shook him. He mumbled and tried to embrace me.

Jesus! Had I got myself a transvestite? 'James! Wake-up! You can't have a trance in here. You'd better get out! Now! Right now! I mean it'

I grabbed one of his feet and twisted it. He yelped as he slipped onto the floor.

"Oooow! Babe? Babe - I don't understand'. His tone was enough like his previous moaning to keep me both scared and angry.

'You heard what I said, get out of here. I want you right out of here. Get out! Now shoo! Out!!' I threw his coat at him and hastily jammed all the clothes I could find into his

'Don't scream, don't scream' he pleaded.

'I am not screaming' I screamed. 'Out!_O U T - spells Vamoose'.

I threw his coat and trousers at him. James stepped into his shoes and ran down the stairs. I chased him out of the house and he headed in the general direction of the main road, a silhouette flapping toward the city lights like a giant moth. Shaking with fright and cold, and most of all disappointment, I returned to the house. As I made my way upstairs, I saw the chap with the bushy red hair leaning against his doorway, his

arms folded across his broad chest. His face was a study in smugness. I realised that he had been there when James and I went flying by. All he said now was 'I'm impressed

Chapter 13

I didn't sleep too well that night and I was glad when Saturday morning rolled around. I looked up from my pillow and saw the clear blue sky through my frosty skylight. I was glad it wasn't dark anymore.

There was a tap on the door. I got out of my warm bed and opened the door. It was the red-haired man. He was wearing baggy denims, a blue and white striped T-shirt, and a multicoloured kerchief tied at the neck. "Good Morning, can I come in?" he said.

His presence intimidated me. He was a good eighteen inches taller than me.

'Yes, I'll make some coffee' I wanted to be a good neighbour. "If you can stand instant'.

"I can if you can, but it's another example of technological advances that are turning us all into robots'. 'Yes. I'm Babe by the way'. 'Nice name. Very suitable. Jack London'. 'Same as....?

'Same as the writer, that's right'.

We shook hands. He looked around the room. Then scowled at the calendar girl. Glanced over the books. He crossed to my

drawing-board and picked up a blank piece of paper.

'Where's all the colossal work you've done so far?' he asked me.

'When I get settled, I think it will come more easily' I said.

'Sheila said you were an artist, and I just took it for granted you'd have some great pictures'.

'You know Sheila?'.

'Sure, sure now, I know Sheila, we've kept in close touch ever since she discovered you'.

'Discovered me?'

There was water in the kettle and, while we talked, I had put it on the stove. I had spooned the coffee into cups. I now stood by the fridge, staring at Jack London as he made himself comfortable on the bed, grouping two cushions and a pillow between his back and the wall.

'Discovered me?' I said again.

'There's a lot to tell you. Anyway I was sort of lying around with Kathy, having this tremendous conversation, when I thought....it's about time I approached you about the posters'.

Jack London had the kind of moist, half-closed eyes that didn't seem to be looking at you when they are. His eyes, his soft voice and his lounging position clashed with the importance of what he was telling me. This casual approach of

his didn't put me at ease at all. It did the opposite.

I felt as if a noose had been dropped around my neck and was being tightened ever so slowly, with an interval for a coffee break. 'Er...Mr. London?' 'Jack'.

'Sorry...Jack - look, I wanted to be an artist, just a nice uncomplicated artist. So many people like me go through life saying they want to do things, and they never do them. The big hurdles were quitting my job, moving out of my parents house, and breaking with my boyfriend. I jumped those hurdles, and now I want to get down to some serious work. I've had a bit of trouble with models, but I'm sticking it out. I'm my own woman. I'm free'.

'Hold on. Those are the wild crazy qualities we like about you. and we were only a little dismayed by the sample of bourgeois notoriety you managed to pick up the other night'.

'Pick up?' 'Who?' 'James Hickey for one'.

'Ah' I blushed.

If you must have a lover, fine. I don't think it's going to hurt the cause'.

'I wish I knew what you were talking about'. Sit down and I'll tell you, but remember, once I do tell you. you're committed'.

I sat in the chair, then glanced up at the skylight, hoping that someone like Tarzan of the Apes was there to save me -the weak and the oppressed, from this menacing man. 'Let me make the coffee first' I said it as if I needed his permission. 'Okay'

I poured the water in the cups with a shaky hand. I put the milk and sugar into mine while Jack took his black. One chair I placed between him and me for a coffee table, the other I sat on.

'Kathy has this wild uncanny knack of brewing coffee and we'll have you down for a cup sometime and rescue you from this sludge' Jack London said. 'I suppose you'll be wanting to know what our plans are for you? So, let me say first that Sheila knows I was going to tell you sometime this weekend, and as I told Kathy "Big Monday" is not far off, so I'd better tell Babe'.

'Go on' I said, feeling very insecure in my nightdress. 'Babe. I've travelled this damn country up and down, from Land's End to John-o-whats-it? And I've met lots of young people like myself and they are as restless as I am. We've never had a revolution here. But we've been listening to promises for far too long, and they.....the Youth that is -want to do something about this unbelievable country of ours'.

'Do they? I said 'What?'.

'Take me - I've hitch-hiked all over. I've worked on farms, harvested potatoes, slept in fields, and everywhere youth is anxious for action. I've thrown-up in the fountains in Trafalgar Square. Trudged for eternity through Norfolk - home of the broads. I've put raging Cats into Parrot cages in Harrods.....and I made wild earth quaking love to a Vicar's wife in Hastings. I inhaled the fishy smell of Hull. I rode a motor-bike through a hotel-foyer in Highgate - I'd been

visiting the tomb of Karl Marx - It's a surge you see, a surge that brought me back here to York, to serve one of the greatest leaders the world has ever known'.

I laughed. 'Not Sheila'.

'No! Sheila is one of the many groupies...er...I mean....concerned citizens who knows we have to do something about this gloomy country....and has joined with an enterprising band of University students to form an Underground Cell called "Rebels in Action" which is planning a great and stupendous political coup'. Subversives? Here in York? I didn't believe it! 'I thought all students were like us when we were at University' I said. 'We all wanted to be Folk Singers, or Actors, Rock stars, or at a pinch - Poets..... and wear Guernsey sweaters and black eye make-up'.

An edge came into his voice 'You don't know what's going on Babe, do you?'

'Obviously, I don't, no.....I.....'.

He interrupted 'We have a great cause, and a great leader'. 'Ah.....I see' I didn't though.

'This is what I crossed the country in search of, a cause and a leader like ours. He is a man who started from his fight for the rights of his fellows and broadened his horizons to encompass changing the entire system of government. Under his leadership we are going to overthrow the present system and establish an entirely new one'. 'Who is this man?' I muttered.

anarchist. We went through the motions of letting you look at rooms, but we wanted you to end up here - where I could be close to you. You are everything we want in a rebel, a talented young woman who has thrown over a comfortable life - that great rarity - a working class artist'.

'The model business' I said in a choked voice 'Why did Sheila help set up those interviews for me?'

'A harmless whim of yours - that you have a lover who doubles as a model. We knew you'd chose James Hickey.....him being the best looker. Feel free to bring men up here if you want, as long as you tell them nothing about the group'.

So Sheila had helped bring all of this about. I felt like telling her that helping other people is a drug so dangerous that there is no cure short of total abstention. My Dad had often warned me that all you did was weaken people by helping them too much.

Jack got up. Flexed his muscles 'thanks for coffee. I've got to get moving' he said.

'You haven't finished it'.

'Kathy and I are making this wild tremendous trek to J J's hideout. One more thing, we want to meet up here on Friday night - at ten o'clock sharp. Patterson will be here and we'll officially induct - is that the right word? Induct you - and it'll be a good chance for you to do some sketches of him'.

I wanted to protest that I wanted no part of this, but I didn't, I just stood there in my nightdress - looking gormless and feeling cold.

'See you soon then' said Jack, and left.

Chapter 14.

Well, here was a fine kettle of haddock alright! That bitch Sheila getting me into this. And that Jack London - taking it for granted that I would paint the posters. I didn't fancy -not one little bit, of being in cahoots with the notorious J.J. Patterson. There I was.....thinking I could break away from a respectable life, and here I am falling in with Hippies - rebellious Hippies at that! Yet the whole business sounded exciting. Now to tell you the truth - I couldn't care less about the state of local government - I couldn't think of one City Councillors name, even if the morning crossword depended on it. But I was all for livening up our City! Who knows, perhaps if we were victorious, Fidel himself would pay us a visit. He'd create quite a stir down the Pub on Saturday night!

I had to get out, my stomach groaned at me to feed it, but I was too excited and scared to make myself anything. I decided that I had to get out of the house before I went dolally! Putting on a coat, I tiptoed past Jack London's door and down to the front hall, where I could hear Mr Marriott banging around in his kitchen. I slipped out the front-door and, once

out on the street, I ran. I felt so relieved to get away from that house that I thought I might never return.

Not sure where I wanted to eat but anxious only to get a good distance away, I walked over Lendal Bridge into Museum Street, not running in case the police took me for a thief.

I was only about a hundred yards down the road when I heard a car door slam and a voice call 'Thanks again, Goodnight'.

This was Bill Forbes. He crossed the road and came towards me.

'Hello, is that you Babe' said the voice.

Bill Forbes? Well now, he was the Judo champ when I was at University. To be honest, I hated anything to do with fighting. But him - he was a body with brains and looks. I used to watch him in the University library, I'd take a seat far enough away from him, so that I could watch him without him noticing me. He once said.....about my artistic ambitions. 'Babe, you're really good, I can't draw a straight line'.

From then on, whenever he saw me, he'd always say 'Hi there Picasso'- which would melt my boots from forty paces.

'Hello Forbes' I said. Nobody ever called him Bill, it was always Forbes.

'What are you doing over this way?' he asked me.

'Nothing' Shit! What could I say? 'I'm looking for you, my knight in shining-bleeding-armour'. So casually, I said 'Just strolling'.

'You look all out of breath, has someone been chasing you?'

'Not really' I told him.

'You sure?'

'Yes' Flaming Picasso! Couldn't I come up with something better than....'yes' and....'not really?'

'This is my place' said Forbes 'come inside and warm up a bit'.

This was more like it. Poor man, I could have ravished him on the spot - he looked so gorgeous 'I don't want to bother you' I sounded really pathetic.

'Has anything happened? You look distressed'.

'No, I was just out for a brisk walk' I gazed straight at him.

'I hear you're an artist now. Do you have a studio?'

Astound him woman - come on.

"Is it near here."

'Not far.....just by 'The Cap and Gown' Number 38.....the old house.....It's got a skylight'.

'I'd like to see it. really I would. You could show me your etchings. I'd love to see a real-life artists studio'. I almost shouted.....WHEN?

But before I could, a very attractive girl opened the door, wearing a dressing gown, with the initials T W on the pocket. 'This is T W said Forbes 'Do you two know each other'. 'Er...no' I said.

The girl looked me up and down before saying 'I don't want to know what she's doing here. I have no right to know at all.'. 'We were both at University' Bill told her 'in the same team'.

'She was in the Judo Team? Yes, she looks as if she might have been'.

'No, no' said Forbes 'The Chess team, we used to play other University Chess Clubs. Didn't we Babe?'

I nodded.

'Babe? That what they call you?' said T W.

'Yes'. I told her.

'Babe called to ask me for a copy of an old book she wanted to borrow' Forbes told her 'Must a minute, I'll get it'

I was thankful for his improvisation, flattered that he'd bothered with one. What could he see in this woman of his?

Well, apart from long blonde hair, blue eyes and big tits.

Was she really his steady, or was it just casual? Could he possibly be living with her? I stood there, feeling the

strained atmosphere - whilst Bill was absent getting this

hook No. no. the silence wasn't golden - it was grey and

Grubby, just how I felt.....standing next to this golden

Haired Madonna

Then she had to tell me she had nothing on under her robe. 'I

Was just waiting for Bill to get home, you see' she said.

I sheepishly grinned. I was still standing in the hallway - so what else could I do?

'Have you got someone at home dear?' T W said 'Or are you on the shelf - waiting for someone to take you down and give you a good dusting?'.

She'd declared World War Three! Attractive women never like me, Why, I don't know. I'm no threat. Perhaps it's because I'm an artist - that makes them feel that their nice tits don't compensate for everything. Why should they have talent - as well as a forty-two-inch chest? Half a minute later Bill returned, carrying a book. He smiled and gave it to me. 'Thank you. See you then'. I left, feeling I'd dipped into my lowest ebb. I stopped by a street lamp and looked at the book's title. It was called "Thursdays Child".....and on the flyleaf.....a pencilled circle around the word Thursday. I yelled 'Yippee' to the new moon. It didn't care.

Chapter 15.

Back in my room Jack London and Forbes competed for my thoughts over the next few days. And did they cause different effects. Jack London sent shivers up my back and gave my stomach a queasy twinge. Thoughts of Forbes warmed my whole body so that even my palms and the soles of my feet perspired. On the one hand, I could look forward with apprehension, to subversive activity, a brush with anarchy, a possible risking of reputation if not life. On the other, I could anticipate at least one evening with a man I had thought unreachable. Forbes wanted to see my garret - but what if the anarchists saw him? They might want to induct him! Or. they might be angry with me for cavorting with a possible informer. It was a chance I didn't want to take. I had to keep Forbes away from my place. But without my garret, would I still be attractive to him? Why did he play the game with the book and not tell T W? Both situations smacked of intrigue, which made it difficult for me to sleep, or for that matter, sit still. I tried to get down to some serious work but I kept getting up and lighting a cigarette that would burn away by itself in a saucer, or quietly going to the second floor to check my hair, or pouring myself a gin and tonic to somehow calm my nerves. I kept staring guiltily at the drawing board. Sometimes, I actually sat and picked up a pencil that never seemed to be sharp enough and I started to sketch something.

My first attempt to draw Forbes's face from memory looked too much like Tarzan of the Apes - so I tried to design a poster.

I printed "Anarchists All" in block capitals, on another sheet - done in the style of the "Superman" comics. Corny, Yes? I wasn't sure "Anarchist" had an "H" in it? Did my destiny lay in the Art world? I scrunched the paper up into a tight ball and fired it as hard as I could at the ghostly galleon tossing on a turbulent sea. The release of energy felt good. I paced the floor. At one point. I took my trophy out of the fridge and stared at it. I remembered my winning throw. With some extra practice. I might be great. I'd represent York in the all-Pubs final and conquer the world. There I was in New York, defeating the American champ, amazing the sports writers with my coolness in every pressure-packed game, staggering to my hotel room afterward to be greeted, stripped and anointed and ignited by a trio of film stars. I shuddered. Was I pursuing the wrong dream? No! I told myself emphatically, after all I'd been drawing since childhood - copying black-and-white engravings from my Dad's collection of "Punch". Hard as the first step seemed, the journey to artistic success could be completed if only you were dedicated and serious enough. The road was narrow and the ditches were strewn with people who only wanted to be artists but did not want to do the work of an artist. Resolving to get down to work as soon as I got back, I went out Monday afternoon to Annie's Cafe. I was waited on by Annie herself, a pleasantly plump woman of about 40 with too much peroxide in her hair and too much powder on her face. With scarlet lipstick, she had turned a pair of narrow lips into a full Cupid's bow. After devouring a cheeseburger, I phoned the secretary of the Ladies darts league. 'Lynda' I said. 'This is Babe' 'Hello Babe! That was a very flattering picture of you in the paper! Really got your good side' 'Yes, it was all right'

'Hey, now, don't put on that modest bit with me, kid. Gloat, gloat, gloat! Did you know that was the best score ever in our league? I was telling Terence we'd better plan a night for you. You know, separate from the annual banquet. You deserve it. I thought perhaps we could all chip in a few pounds - oops! He told me not to tell you. When you see him, don't let on you know, okay?

'Lynda, that sounds terrific, but - oh, I know this is silly but - I want to give up league darts'

There was silence and then a tiny 'What?'

'It seems like the right time to retire' I said, slowly. 'Retire while I'm on top. Lots of players do that'.

'Have you been drinking? You can't just up and retire in mid-season when you played a perfect game! It isn't done! The Association wouldn't like it at all. Oh wait- I heard you and Brian were.....I expect you feel bad about that.....'

'It's not Brian. I just don't want to play anymore. I've played the best game possible - and that takes all the fun out of it"

'Babe, take a week to think about it" Look, I'll introduce you to my brother Dan - we'll welcome you back next week'

I hesitated. Lynda's brother might be worth meeting - one night at the pub, the girls were passing around a murky photo of Lynda's brother posing by a motor-bike with his top half naked. He wasn't very proportionate but he might consider posing for an artist, especially one who had won a darts match practically on her own.

No, I don't think I would pursue that course.

'Lynda, my mind's made up' I said 'Sorry to leave you in the lurch but that's the way it has to be'.

Once I'd got rid of her, I turned to leave the phone, but I saw Jack London coming around the counter from Annie's back room. Annie stood at the cash register in her pink smock and he waved to her. I noticed a light go out above the back room door. Not wanting to see Jack, I turned and hunched up close to the telephone and dropped in another coin. I dialled.

My Mum picked up the phone.

'Hello'.

'Hello, this is Babe'.

'Babe? Where are you? Are you all right?'.

'Fine. I'm fine'.

'Are you eating? Do you need anything?'

'I miss your cooking mum, but I'm okay. No, I don't need anything. I'm living in a garret, doing my own housekeeping, and everything. I really enjoy it'.

'Your Dad is at work, but you could call again when he's home. You will, won't you?'

'Maybe mum, I just wanted you to know I was okay'.

'Did you call Brian? He sat with me at Mass last Sunday. He's really a nice boy, Babe. He said he hadn't seen you since you moved'.

'No, well, it's all over between us'.

'Oh dear, Babe'

'Don't 'Oh dear' Mum, it's all for the best, in this best of.....etcetera, etcetera.....'

'What's that supposed to mean, Babe?'.

'I don't know mum'. I was tired. 'Hey, Mum, did you see the picture of me in the local paper?

'Mrs Chapman next door told us about it. You had a good game, didn't you?'

'I did, yes'

'Funny thing' my Mum said.

'What is?'

'A girl playing darts. We didn't bring you up to spend your life in pubs'.

'Don't blame yourself, Mum, It's an innocent enough pastime'.

'Yes, well' said my mother 'I don't know what we did wrong, really I don't. We tried, your father and I'.

She began to cry.

'No, mum, please.....not tears. Remember what you used to tell me when I was a little girl and I cried? "Those tears will run down your cheeks, and into your mouth, and you'll drown in salt water" Remember?'

My mum started to laugh. 'Yes, I remember, you were such a good little girl'.

'No, I wasn't. I was a horrible child. I used to encourage my baby brother to play with matches, hoping he'd burn to death.

And I used to steal his food, I watched for signs of him Starving, but he never did - I even put him in the dustbin once'

'Oh, Babe, I'm glad you're my daughter, you do make me laugh'.

'Yes mum, but sometimes I make myself bloody cry'.

'Oh, I do miss you'.

'Mum, Is there any mail for me?'

'No love. Your dad and your brother want to visit you.

We'd all like to see you. Couldn't we have your address?'

'Not this week mum, maybe next'.

'Are you keeping warm in this weather? Are you having your boiled egg in the morning? Are you having.....?'

'I have to go now. Bye, mum' I said.

'Goodbye, dear. God bless you'.

I put down the phone. Jack London walked into the hall.

'Calling home, eh?'

'Even anarchists have mothers' I quipped.

'Suppose so. If you're getting lonely, you could always interview more models'.

He was leering into my left eye again. 'How's your Kathy?' I asked him.

'She's not mine, I just see a lot of her'.

'I'll remember that'.

'Got any Poster ideas to show me yet?'

'No, I'll let you know when I do'

'Want me to come and get you started?' He leered again. Then he pushed by me into my room.

What could I have done? He was bigger than me. Up in my attic, he told me more about his travels back and forth across this England of ours, whilst I did a fast poster sketch for him, mainly to prove I could. "RESTORE HONESTY TO GOVERNMENT" it said.

'We need catchier slogans than that woman'.

'What about "CHE FOR TRUTH" I asked him. I sketched as he continued talking.

'Better'.

Or "IN CHE WE TRUST" I suggested. He liked that one better. He said it would look really good with a drawing of his leader. I finished the poster sketch. 'Terrific! I'll take them with me'. He took the slogan from me and left.

I sat motionless, wondering and worrying about the life I was leading.

I snapped out of my musing some minutes later when a puffing Mr Marriott arrived at my door to collect the next week's rent.

Chapter 16.

When I was a little girl. I used to always be asking my mother "When will Christmas come?" 'Is it here yet?' Now here I was again, waiting for something. This is what artists do, I thought.....wait for their lovers after painting masterpieces all day. But all I'd painted was "CHE LIVES" and stuff like that. That would not mean much in the Art world.

Thursday evening, I walked through the snowy streets. The cold nipped at my ears but I rubbed them with my coat lapels. I sprinted, not caring at all what policemen might think of a fleeting figure by the river. Running seemed to be the thing to do when you were going to see Bill Forbes. None of those forlorn High Street people stopped me for a shilling or a match. I ran past them all.

Funny, but I wasn't a bit winded as I dashed into the familiar garden and up to the front door.

T W opened the door. 'Hello' I said I'm.....

'Forbes is not home' said the girl. She looked sceptically at my untidy hair. 'Was he expecting you?'

I suddenly thought, perhaps Forbes hadn't put the circle round "Thursday" at all, maybe the book ploy was just a way of getting rid of me.

'I thought he was' I said.

I felt pretty stupid for not making a phone call. I realised I hadn't telephoned because I was afraid he'd have second thoughts and turn me down.

'He's at Chess practice, I think. Look, I'd ask you in, but, you see, at the moment I'm.....'

'Do you mind if I wait out here?' I asked.

'It's cold'.

'It's all right. I'll just sit on the step. He might not be long'.

'Dear, dear....I'm sorry about this. Perhaps I'd better get him to call you'.

'I'll wait. I'm fine. Really'.

She looked worried when she closed the door. I heard the lock click. I suppose I did look like one of those derelicts, though I wore my best jumper under the coat. Where was Forbes? I hoped T W wouldn't call the police and ask them to collect me off the steps. Why had Forbes stood me up? I sat there until my teeth chattered, ten minutes perhaps. I had started feeling sorry for myself when I caught sight of a figure wildly gesturing under a street lamp further down the road.

A minute later, I realised that the person might be making signs at me. I didn't recognise Forbes at first because he wore a bulky duffle-coat and a red golf cap. But it was him. 'I thought you weren't going to recognise me' he smiled as I approached. He pulled me along out of sight of the house. 'Where did you come from?' I asked. 'I was at the Chess club. I got off the bus further down'. 'I never expected.....' 'I know, I know. It's just that I'm supposed to be going steady with T W, and she'd give me an earful. I knew you'd be here about the same time as the other night, so I tried to get here before you. What did she say when you knocked?' "She looked scared. She said you were at Chess practice'. 'I'm sorry for all the secretive stuff'. 'I can't get over the fact that we both worked out the time to meet without consulting each another. Why don't we go into town - see a film'. 'You said you were going to show me your studio'. 'Er.....not right now. It's nice to get out of there for a change. Let's go somewhere'. 'You know I can't be seen with you, don't you? If we go into town, someone's bound to see us and report it to T W'. This was an uppercut straight to the heart! 'I could always lend you a balaclava to disguise yourself with' I said, grinning to show him it was meant to be a joke. He didn't laugh.

'The main reason I said I'd see you was that I'm interested in your garret. I might be able to give you some decorating ideas'.

'Perhaps later, all right?'

'I can't stay out forever' he said.

'How about coffee at the Kardoma. Would anyone know you there?'

'Oh, I'll take a chance. It should be okay on a Thursday'.

We laughed and talked on our way to the coffee shop. We had their poached eggs on toast with chips, dousing them in vinegar and salt. Forbes watched everyone who came in, concerned as he was about being recognised. At the same time he smiled and winked at me, as if he wanted to make the evening enjoyable even under the restricting circumstances. We discussed the years at University that we had in common. The glorious night of the New Year dance, when I was there with a chap that thought Charlton Heston was a wrestler. The year the football team won the University cup. And the year our college appeared on University Challenge, and lost. The drama club production of 'As You Like It' with Forbes as Orlando and me taking tickets all week - not being able to rip six tickets in half at once and having some wit say 'You ought to try phone books' - and the end of term party in a wealthy undertaker's house where I couldn't take my eyes off Forbes.

The time the Engineering students went wild because Sam Wilburn, one of the college magazine writers, called them "dead fish" and the way the editor and I spirited him off the grounds and hid him in a church basement until it had all blown over. We laughed about the ten students stuffed in the telephone box. And that Christmas when we'd hoisted the red flag in place of the Union Jack. As we left the coffee shop and walked along Petergate, happily holding hands, we laughed about the Arts Club dance. I'd gone with a small bloke called David Mason - who kissed like an Ant-eater. Forbes was there with a girl who later got a job as a researcher at the House of Commons. I'd got falling down drunk, and a few of us had left the Royal Hotel to go to a another dance, carrying bottles of wine in our coats, yelling at each other across the dance floor, spilling booze on the chaps and their rented dinner jackets. I talked as if I'd been the holy terror of the girls college - meanwhile Forbes said nothing about where he'd gone with the prospective researcher, and I didn't want to know. 'Then there were your cartoons in the Rag week Mag' Forbes said. 'You knew I liked them'

'You said you did'.

'Can't I come up to your studio, see your latest work?' 'The fact is' I said 'I haven't done any!' "I can't believe that. Come on'.

At this point I should have rendered my off-key version of "Love For Sale" but I couldn't remember the words, so I kept quiet. 'All right. Come on' I said. Now, his enthusiasm befuddled me, I wanted to go along with whatever he wanted to do. If he enjoyed himself, he might want to see me again. But I didn't want him to know anything about "The Rebels" and I didn't want them to meet him. A frosted-up car had to swerve

to miss us as we crossed the street. We continued to talk, partly about Forbes's University courses, partly about my new career.

'I admire anyone who could break away from the status quo the way you have' he said.

That gave me confidence as we approached the house.

'It's quaint' he said. 'Is it everything you want. Who does this house belong to by the way?'

'An old man. I just have the top room'

'I bet he's a lovely old gentleman'.

'Sssssshh! He might be sleeping'.

'You have to be that quiet?'

'He's very strict about noise'.

I opened the front door slowly. It squeaked. Poking my head inside, I looked and listened for signs of Mr Marriott or Jack London. I heard a radio start up somewhere in the house. It was The Four Aces "Mr Sandman" Forbes looked as if he might join in on the chorus.

'Please don't speak until we get upstairs, and then whisper' I whispered.

I stopped suddenly, as one of the stairs squeaked. I listened.

'I feel like we're robbing the place'. Forbes said with a smirk.

We then tiptoed across the creaky floor. There was no trace of Mr Marriott in his living room.

Someone was in the bathroom when we went past - the sound of running water covered our footsteps. I could not relax until we stepped into my room, and then I didn't really relax when I thought of who was with me. I turned on the light. 'It's terrific' said Forbes - much too loudly. 'Sshhhhhhh'.

'Sorry, but it is...it's great. I never would have guessed you could find a skylight like that in this city. I'd add a drape over there, slap some gold paint on that wall, and build a drawing-table under that arch. But it has possibilities. Where are all your drawings, by the way?'

'I told you, I haven't done any'.

'Why are you so nervous? This Marriott must rule with an iron hand around here'.

'There's nothing much to see'.

'Is it me that's bothering you, Babe? I mean, the fact that I'm here?'

'Perhaps'.

'Well, don't let T W or anything bother you. I can take care of myself. You don't have to win marks for good behaviour you know'.

His blue eyes looked level at me. I melted, and tried not to show that my heart was pounding hard, but only partly out of fear. 'Would you like a drink?' I asked him.

'Great' he said. He slipped out of his duffle-coat and sat on the bed. I went to the fridge, sneaked the silver trophy out - and hide it behind the cornflakes. When I brought him a bottle of beer and a cup, he said.' You

must get on with your painting you know, you must not waste time'.

'Or time will waste me, eh? I know I have to do something that'll sell, or I'd better give up and become a streetwalker'

We had half-finished our beer, not saying much of anything, when I held my face up to be kissed. Forbes placed his drink on the lino-clad floor.

Of course I had to go and kick his beer over. I pretended nothing had happened.

'Mind if I shut off the light' I whispered.

'You worried your landlord will walk across the roof and peek in?'

We both laughed but I did turn out the light. We smoothly moved back into a sitting-up clinch. He moved his hand towards my bosom, I gently pushed it away, but didn't flinch. Eventually, it was necessary to break for air. 'I can't believe you're here' I said.

'I can't either, it beats the living room at my place for privacy'.

I kissed him again and this time his hand went behind my neck and pressed as if he was trying to ease me down onto the bed. 'Look Forbes, If you're really walking out with T W, then I don't understand any of this'. I spoke mainly because we seemed to be progressing far too quickly and I needed time to get control of myself. I had the shakes. Wasn't I the too-nice girl who lacked aggressiveness? Two banks, an Insurance company and a meat packing store couldn't be wrong.

He laughed. 'Walking out? I haven't heard anyone use that expression since my old Granny died'.

When he looked at me, his face bathed in milky-grey moonlight, his dark eyebrows and his blue eyes were his most striking features.....well...I was a goner!

'You're right' he said 'I shouldn't be here on the sly like this'.

He sat up grazing my cheek with his lips.

'Wait, hey!.....I didn't mean.....'

'It's best I leave. T W, will be looking for me. Let's mop up the beer first'.

I watched him go at the spilled beer with a towel. For the moment I was immobilized by anger for making him feel guilty.

'You just got here, I'll make some coffee or something'.

'I do have to go, it's a good walk from here'.

If he left, I might never see him again. Would he kiss me Goodnight? There had been crucial moments like this for me before. In a darkened doorway, a man would pause, hand on door-knob, about to disappear under my parents surveillance. That pause was critical. To be grabbed - or not to be grabbed - that was the question!

I watched him put on his coat and scarf. I picked mine up.

'You don't need to come with me' he said.

'I'd like to, we'll get a taxi'.

"And waste money? No need'.

He turned toward the door. I didn't know whether I was invited to accompany him or expected to or what. I suddenly

panicked at the thought that if he walked out of my garret I'd never see him again.

Forbes thanked me with 'Thanks for the nice time'.

I reached out, driven on by the word 'nice' all my senses yelling at me to embrace him. All I managed to get was a handful of his scarf as he crossed to the door, buttoning up his duffle-coat. The scarf came off. He turned to retrieve it. 'I thought pulling off boys scarves was saved for the playground'

I said something, I think it was 'wait' and his expression changed. He then kissed me so hard, he hurt my teeth. I had to prove that I might be nice, but I wasn't stupid.

Feverishly, we clutched each other and, still kissing I tried to unbutton his bulky toggles on his duffle-coat. We teetered and nearly fell as we squeezed each other and so I leant back against the wall. I placed my mouth near his left ear and whispered his name, you know the way heroines in the films do. 'William - Bill - Forbes'. I think he liked that because he said 'Mmmmmmmm' or something, and he pulled my sweater out of my skirt, so that he could send his hands up onto my bare back and I was embarrassed to be wearing a woollen vest, but he didn't seem to mind, and pulled that up too and his hands were cold on my back at first but they soon warmed up. Taking his lead, I reached up and kissed him again - our faces burning, our hands roving, my hand was shaking too much to master the amazing mechanism that held his duffle-coat together.

'I have to go' said Bill.

'Not yet'.

'I really do have to go'.

'Will I see you again?'

'Certainly'.

'When?'

I was pushing my luck!

'I'll come over Friday night, eight-thirty'.

'I'll work. I'll draw. I promise'

'Good' said Forbes 'see you'.

With that he left.

Chapter 17.

One summer when I had just turned seventeen and was visiting friends in Scotland, I met this young American student. We saw each other every day for a week. After one intense session with him, I hurried back to my bedroom, shut the door and dashed off a progress report to my friend Rosemary. 'My dearest friend and close companion' I wrote.....I was very much into Jane Austin at this time.....'I now take up my pen to present you with the inducements and motives for my current state which would most assuredly be diagnosed as an acceptable form of light-headedness. The Gods of puberty must themselves be rejoicing for, this very night, your affectionate and humble servant has succeeded in having her boobs felt' I kept thinking about that letter as I tossed and turned in my bed after Forbes had gone. I was elated, ecstatic, euphoric, and frustrated, but I had no need to tell

Rosemary or anyone else. I wanted to keep the evening's experience to myself. Perhaps that was how I hoped to preserve the dream, or perhaps it was just a sign of maturity!

In the morning, my room seemed colder than usual, so I set about keeping warm by doing things. I did a few exercises, like running on the spot - beating my record of four minutes. I vigorously dusted everything with a pair of dirty tights. I cleaned the rings on my stove and washed out the kitchenette with a face cloth.

When the mood struck me. I sat down to draw Forbes. Where the day before, my mind had been filled with Jack London, Forbes, Sheila, Forbes, Jack London. Forbes. Mother, Dad.....it now burst with - Forbes. I doodled with his face by the hour, forgetting meals. I drank the occasional Gin and tonic. I didn't go out, and I didn't see anyone, not even Jack London. I couldn't sit still long enough to do a decent drawing. I was oblivious of all sounds and activity elsewhere - I was brimming with Forbes.

By Friday I needed a meal. I went out and had - spaghetti, chips, bread and butter, and three cups of tea. Returning to the house. I treated myself to a leisurely soak. I was halfway through my bath hit parade.....when I remembered where I was, and then I didn't give a tinkers damn. I was bubbling over with anticipation. I sprayed scent down my bosom. I don't know why I bothered really - back then, mine were a bit like two poached eggs!

Forbes arrived shortly before eight-thirty, carrying a few books, and a small case.

I smiled at him 'How did you get in?'

'Front door was open'.

'Did anyone see you?'

'Yes, I knocked on all the doors'.

'What's in the case?'

'A few props. I came here out of sheer vanity. I'm going to pose for you'.

He went over to my table to look at what I'd done.

'You are talented, that's a perfect likeness of Marion Brando'.

'Come on' I said, helping him take his coat off 'that's supposed to be you'.

'Really?'

'Actually it's more like Tarzan of the Apes'.

He flitted around the room, throwing himself into artistic poses. He tilted his head, flexed his muscles.

'I have to tell you, Babe, your place isn't as dingy as I expected'

'I cleaned it up'

'I thought it might be crawling with Cockroaches or something'

'There aren't any Cockroaches - too frightened of the Rats!'

'No! Really?'

'Just a joke'

Forbes seemed to be making himself at home. He seemed

carefree and happy. I tried to be the same, a carefree, nonchalant artist. Sweeping the eraser crumbs off my table with the little hand brush I'd brought from my mother's, I took a fresh piece of paper and taped it to the drawing board. While I did that, Forbes produced a portable radio and found a station playing "Lighter Shade of Pale".

'Let's dance' he said.

The idea of dancing in the garret jarred me but how could I refuse? I slipped easily into his arms and he had no trouble guiding me around the room using Arthur Murray's easy dance steps. The smell of his hair filled my nostrils and made me want to kiss him - but it was too early for that. 'I'd better get on with some drawing' I said when the music ended and the weather announcer relieved the disc jockey with news of gales and storms off Malin-Head.

'Is Tarzan the only one you've done all week?' Forbes asked.

'Yes, I needed you to inspire me'.

'You're worse at getting down to your work than I am. At least I started my Adam Bebe essay last night'.

He bounced on the bed a few times and then settled down on a chair where he riffled through "The Catcher in the Rye" and read a passage.

It sounded wonderful. He had such a gorgeous voice, he'd have made a cattle auction sound like Shakespeare.

'How about a study of man with book?' he asked, keeping his head tilted down toward the page.

'I can't see much of your face'.

'Just try it'. I worked for nearly half an hour, trying to concentrate on rendering a likeness of him. Whenever my mind slipped into thoughts like - 'that's your idol you've got posing for you, the man you drooled over in the University library' I made a stupid mistake. I feverishly worked on the folds of his clothes. It just wouldn't come out soft enough - the shadows were like black stripes.

'How's it coming?' he asked without moving his head.

'I'm having trouble with your trousers'.

'Funny, that's what T W said the last time we were parked in her car'.

I grimaced.

'Forbes' I said, erasing the pencil line I'd nervously dragged across the drawing 'that was pretty tasteless'.

'Sorry, I'll be serious. I think you're taking too long with this first one. I thought you might knock off six or seven fast sketches and gradually work on something major'.

'Sorry I work so slowly' I said 'Let's try something else. I've kept you in that pose too long. Go on stretch all you want, and we'll start again'.

'Just a minute, I'm going to make a change. You turn your back and get a fresh sheet of paper while I go into the kitchenette and make a quick change of costume'.

'Great'.

He took his case and glided past me into the tiny kitchen area. I felt terrific, we were both in the best of spirits.

As I tore off the first sketch and prepared for the next.

I thought, what a far cry this is from Hancock and Millars!

'This is really very good of you, to pose...I mean'.

Just then, I thought I heard a commotion downstairs, but I ignored it when Forbes returned to centre-stage, beneath the dangling light bulb. He was swathed in a blue and white bath towel, and wore Red Indian make-up. I gasped at the sight and told him that he was everything I had ever imagined a model could be. 'You look like a warrior' I said.

'You could paint me as Hiawatha'.

He stepped forward confidently, like Geronimo walking into a peace parley. He stood by a chair, where the bare bulb caught him with the fewest shadows. I took the red crayon and ran it wildly across the paper, not knowing when to look at him and when to look at my work. I saw the towel begin to move, falling away from his hips. I looked at his face, it was fixed in a devilish smile. Slowly and artfully, he inched the towel down off his body. And now I was drawing and colouring without even looking at the paper and my hand somehow separated from my head and while my frantic fingers sprayed Crazy strokes of red across the paper, my eyes stayed glued to Forbes, who was standing still, his only covering - the towel - in a pool at his feet.

The door flew open.

'Hello Babe' was all I heard from Jack London as he barged into the room, with Sheila and at least three others coming up behind.

I think I yelled.

'What have we here? What have we here?' Jack asked.

'Good God!' someone said.

'Well, well' I think that was Sheila.

I dropped my pencils and at last remembered the meeting.

Glancing at my watch, I saw it was exactly ten o'clock.

'You could at least have knocked' I said, weakly.

Sheila was enjoying Forbes's attempts to get the towel up around himself. Jack London was laughing and pointing from me to Forbes. Two of the others were grinning lecherously. At that moment I was only vaguely aware of the dark, long-haired man standing in the doorway. I knew it must be J.J. Patterson but in all the confusion, I had to ignore him.

'I thought you'd abandoned the idea of a model' Jack London said.

"Can we get on with the meeting' one of the others said.

'Babe' Forbes cried 'Who are these people?'

He stood in a corner clutching the towel tight around him. He looked angry.

"They are.....er.....um.... ..members of The University Arts Society' Sheila said 'It was very wrong of Babe not to tell you about our meeting here tonight. But don't worry, you can strut around naked all you like, we're all oblivious to such things'.

They looked about as oblivious as the front row hecklers at a Wrestling Match, but I had to go along with her.

'She's right, Forbes' I said 'I forgot we had this meeting here tonight, I'm sorry we have to interrupt the sitting, we'll continue tomorrow'.

'I'm staying until this meeting is over' said Forbes.

'Impossible' said Jack London. 'What we have to discuss tonight does not concern models. We cannot risk having our artistic secrets leaking out to rival groups'.

'I wouldn't tell any.....'

'I'm sorry you'll have to leave' Jack insisted.

'But.....' I said.

'Well, goodnight, then' said Forbes.

With his towel trailing behind him, he picked up his clothes and case and bolted from the room. The dark long-haired man had to step aside to let him go by. He went downstairs and I heard the bathroom door slam. So much for our beautiful friendship I thought.

Fear replaced mourning of my lost model when the dark man came inside and closed the door. Without speaking, two men moved the kitchen table out into the centre of the room as the man who was obviously J.J. Patterson plopped a battered attaché case onto the bed. From the case he produced two candles in holders. He set them on the table and light them. Jack London turned off the overhead bulb. The candles gave my garret a jaundiced underground atmosphere. 'Men' said Jack London

'And women' said Sheila.

'Yeah, women.....we have a new and trusted member in our midst. She has agreed to do our all important posters, which will soon decorate every telephone box and bare wall in the city. Let me first induct her into the group and we'll sort of get this great crazy meeting underway. Babe, step forward'.

A solemn hush fell over the room. I stepped forward, self-consciously.

'Raise your right hand'.

'Right hand?' I asked.

'That's it. Repeat after me. I hereby swear that I shall fight for freedom'.

'I hereby swear that I shall fight for freedom'. 'From waste, inefficiency, bureaucracy and trivially.....under the banner of Che Fidel Patterson'

'Under the banner of She...sorry....Che.....Fidel Patterson'.

'And that, in my struggle for better city government....'

'And that, in....my?...oh, yeah....my struggle for better city government....'

'I shall divulge none of the rebel plans'.

I shall divulge none of the rebel plans'.

'And any blood I may spill will not spill in vain'.

And an\.....What?'

'You heard'

'But surely there won't be any bloodshed?'

Bound to be some bloodshed, Babe' he said 'Bloodless coups went out with William and Mary, bound to be some bloodshed'.

'I don't like the sound of this' I said. 'The Lord Mayor isn't going to like it'.

'Oh. come on. now - the people follow - we lead! Let's finish the pledge. Any blood I may spill will not be spilt in vain.....'

'All right. Any blood I may spill will not be spilt in vain'.

'Congratulations Babe, You are now a fully fledged member of "Rebels for Action". President Patterson meet your newest recruit, Miss Babe....er.....well, Babe'.

I turned to face the man with the dark hair and the Zapata moustache. There was an aura of the Nineteenth Century about him. He wore a grey suit and a sloppily tied red bow-tie. One eye stared at me, while the other was covered with a black eye-patch. Below his moustache, his jaw and mouth were firmly set. I had seen his picture in the newspaper and I trembled to think that such a well-known villain was here under my skylight.

'We want the people of this City to be a free people' he said, seizing my hand. 'Let us help each other'.

A subdued cheer went up from the others. Jack London took me around, introducing me to each of them. The first was a young political science student in a leather jacket. His John Lennon glasses, hunched shoulders, wrinkled forehead and Sherlock Holmes pipe made him look about fifty years old.

Alex Sitwell had greasy black hair, red eyes, and large, ever puckered lips that loosely held a half-smoked joint. Linus McGrellis was the third one I didn't know. He seemed bewildered by everything as he chewed on his nails. Friendly enough, he resembled a person who had stumbled into the wrong wedding reception and is asked to dance by the bride's mother.

And then there was Sheila.

'Men...and.....er..lady' said Jack London 'Make yourselves at home while President Patterson sits for Babe. Babe, you can be sketching our leader while we proceed with the meeting'.

Sheila and two of the others sat on the floor, Brendan sat on the bed, and I took up my position behind the drawing table. The imposing J J Patterson sat on the model's chair. Jack London remained standing.

'The greatest night of our lives is coming up on Monday' Jack said 'It's the night I went back and forth across this waterlogged country to end up here for. Monday night the city council will be ours. People in this city are like people everywhere - they don't go to council meetings. They'll be no spectators, perhaps one or two policeman, but, let me tell you, we'll have enough men.....'

'And women' said Sheila.

'Yeah, alright Sheila, enough men.....and women - to surprise them, and before the Army arrive to interfere, we'll be the new City Council! Next stop Parliament!.

'Wouldn't it be less dangerous for you to run for the Council and get elected' I blurted out as I started Che Fidel's outline.

'Voting is outdated Babe' said Sheila.

'That's correct' said Jack London. 'Political coups are the thing today. You can tell by talking to housewives and teachers and even roller-skating kids that they're fed up with the Council. They want a change to younger men'.

I listened to all this, not sure what to think or say. I kept quiet.

'As Sheila said yesterday, we need new blood. I like to think of it that way. We take over quickly when the Council least expects it, and the people will love us for it. We'll be hero's if we show them we are real, alive and throbbing with new ideas'.

'I thought this was the age of.....Peace, Love and Flowers?' I said.

'That's all very well for others....but we need a pre-emptive strike' said Jack London.

'Do we?' I said.

'We are all brothers and what's-its?' said J..L Patterson. 'You see Babe.....A coup d'etat is the best thing for this country. Shake it up a bit' said Jack London.

'Elvis Presley'.

'Eh?" said Sheila.

'Going to shake it up - You know - Elvis'.

Linus then spoke. 'As Bob Dylan says 'The times they are a'changing' .

'And if you can't lend a hand get out of the way' Is that it?" I said.

'Exactly' said Che Fidel.

'Bob Dylan can afford a revolution. He's a multi millionaire - twice over' I said.

'You don't understand, Babe. We can the show the people that we're alive and throbbing with ideas and we can change the worn-out old constitution, and we promise elections -well....very soon. We are all brothers and sisters' said J J Patterson.

Jack London explained the strategy, which was painfully simple. 'Once our group has overwhelmed the authorities by sheer surprise, I will install J.J. as head of the new party, re-named 'The Che Fidel Yorkshire Commune' We will then announce spending on 85 new police cars and build a brand new police station and double police salaries. We'll enhance the police image by calling the new station "Public Safety Building". With the police on our side, we'll then be able to imprison anyone who objects to our new policies. I've searched for the truth throughout this crazy world and I've found it here, in the service of this great man' Jack' said.

'Fidel Che - 'you will be made Minister in charge of finances - Ward 2..... As well as handling Power, Transport, Industry. Town Planning and the Dog Pound. Sheila will handle Public works. Museums, Libraries, and Children's Entertainments. We can sort out the rest later'

'You've forgotten Refuse Collection' said Sheila.

'Eh?' said Fidel.

'Dustbins!' said Sheila.

Though my hands shook. I finished drawing J.J. Patterson. They gathered around to inspect my work.

'His hair isn't that colour' said Sheila.

'It's good' the others agreed.

'It's very....very.....well, it's me, isn't it?' said Fidel Che Patterson. 'We'll use this sketch with the IN J J WE TRUST, Jack London said.

'We'll plaster these posters all over the City' Linus proceeded to give us a report on the student involvement. As he spoke, I thought how odd it was that these students preferred rioting and demonstrating to studying or propping up the bar. I'd only been gone from University a year and a half and they'd changed a lot already. Jack thanked Linus and confirmed that we'd all meet at my place at seven-thirty on Monday evening. To transport everyone to the Town Hall, we'd use a lorry belonging to one of the students father, who owned three or four local companies.

'Remember the young are on our side, they'll plaster posters everywhere. I've seen students scrawling CHE LIVES and REVOLUTION NOW on at least three buildings in the City' said Jack.

'Perhaps we could involve the Infants school' I said.

'They could be given crayons and scrawl "MORE SUGAR ON OUR DUMMIES NOW"' on the side of their Cots and highchairs'.

'Now, Babe, don't be sarcastic' said Sheila. 'J J knows what he's doing'. "All members will help out. And remember do not tell a soul about this' said Jack. 'We must be off now' said Che Fidel.

'Right, well goodnight, fellow artists' I said.

'We will bring a responsible Government to this City' Che Fidel said as he shook my hand decisively and went out, clutching his case and two candles.

'We will look after all artists and children when we grab power' he said as he went into the hallway.

I was tempted to hold Sheila back and tell her what I thought about her sneaky tactics in getting me mixed up with this lot. But I was so dejected that I just watched her leave with the others. What a night! I thought, dropping exhausted onto the creaky bed. God! Imagine Forbes wanting to pose like that! I looked at my drawing table and chuckled wryly at the picture that might have been. It was wrong to let those people treat him so shabbily, but under the circumstances I hadn't felt very brave. I slowly undressed, trying to put the complete train of events together in my head. After some minutes of weary thought. I turned off the light and crawled into my cold but peaceful bed. Sleep was never so welcome. Tap. tap.

I jumped up 'Who's that' I gasped.

'It's me'

I nearly tripped in my lunge for the door. I unlocked it and there stood Forbes. I left the light off and let him in

'Well, well. you wear pyjamas' he said.

'You came back!' I said with a gulp of surprise. I still wasn't sure if he was angry.

'I never left' he whispered. 'I thought your Artists Club sounded very odd. so I got dressed in the toilet - crept up the stairs and listened at the door'.

'They might have caught you'.

'They might have, but they made so much noise when they were about to leave, I had plenty of time to scuttle back to the bathroom to hide, but...Wow! did I get an earful!'

'Forbes, I'm sorry they walked in like that, just when you...'

'That's okay. I forgive you'

As he spoke, he pulled his sweater over his head. I realized that, for the second time tonight, he was disrobing.

'Forbes, I think it's a little late to do a drawing of you now'

'My modelling career is over, at least for tonight. But my political activity is just beginning. Shall we see what we can negotiate. Rebel?'

I shall draw a veil over that night. Some things are sacred. We each said 'I love you'

They were the days when you said 'I love you' whether you meant it or not.

You sort of felt it was expected of you. like a man taking off his hat when a lady entered a lift. But I know I was convinced that I was in love.

Chapter 18.

When the sun came up next morning, bombarding my bed with blinding white shafts, my eyes opened and my mind leaped into alertness so fast that my head ached.

Forbes lay turned away from me, his hair inches from my face, we had found the best use of space required.

For a moment I wondered what my Mother would think of this.

What a dirty trick to play on her, going to bed with a man before I was married. She deserved better. I spotted my nightdress strewn over the drawing board, I thought, how symbolic it was of the middle class morality I had shed in the past few days. Strange World it was where a girl could go for so long looking forward to the culmination of a laborious courtship, the wedding day, when she could finally sleep with her boy friend, a day that it seemed would never dawn, and then suddenly wind up in bed with her dream man. a man thought to be totally unattainable, without any preliminary fuss. Everything had happened far too swiftly. With virtually no chance to prepare myself - there I was in bed with Bill Forbes, and never had I had even an inkling of how demanding such an event could be. My experienced friends had always made the seduction sound like the difficult part, but I found out, through trial and error, that the real operation began after you were in bed. Oh, I had heard jokes and read the racy novels of the period, but things just didn't go as smoothly as they always suggested. Nevertheless, though Forbes didn't seem completely new to this business, he did exercise wonderful patience, and in his way, he prevented me from feeling that this was my first test. Part of Forbes's back was exposed. As I drew the blanket up to cover it, I wondered fleetingly about TW - but I didn't worry. I was a rebel now. I tucked the sheet in around Forbes's neck.

'Thank you' he said.

'You're awake'.

'Who could sleep with that search light blasting down on us?'

He turned over to face me.

'Good Morning' he said.

'Morning'. I touched his hip.

'Oww - your hands are cold'.

'Poor hands'

'More like poor circulation'

'Forbes - you're still here'

'You can't let me go - I might tell the press about a certain bunch of Rebels!'

He moved closer, radiating the warmth of a small inferno. Cold hands or not, I put my arms around him.

It was exciting to hold him in the stark roaring daylight. The sun picked out all the little impurities of his face and made him that much more real to me and well, I have to say - a lot more sensual. This beautiful young man became infinitely more beautiful as he grew passionate, and it was an added treat to be able to see the change happening in broad daylight. Something about his eyes softened, his eyebrows arched a little, his mouth became more moist. I can tell you I was pretty tense that morning, telling myself that I had to do better, despite all Forbes's comforting comments. 'It's okay Babe, take it easy, it'll be fine'.

There was a horrible moment when I thought all was lost, that the idea of being there with him was too much for me. But, wonder of wonders, as our morning bodies slowly closed in on one another, when I murmured in his ear 'Mmmmmm, your old beard feels so nice now' and caressed him, I took over, I tell you, I shrugged off that inhibiting niceness I'd carried like a cocoon for all those years and flexed my wings with confidence.

I became aggressive, let me tell you, all you out there, I turned into a tigress, a winner, the rising star, in fact I was potentially Vice-Chancellor of the Art College, and when my bed partner moved and flung his arms around my neck and closed his eyes - I knew I was the happiest, healthiest, most successful young woman in the whole of the western world.

Spent, tangled, together, bedclothes interwoven with our limbs like vines, we eventually had to get untangled. I lay back with my hands behind my head.

Forbes leaned on one elbow at my side, a perfect profile nuzzling my shoulder.

'I expect you are wondering what I'm doing here?' he said.

'It never crossed my mind'.

'I know you've been thinking about it. and I have to tell you it's all your fault'.

'How'?

"You decided to do what you always wanted to do and you did it, even though it was unconventional. I'll bet you upset some people in the process'.

I nodded.

'Parents, boyfriend?'

'Yes'.

'I told you I liked anyone who had the guts to declare their freedom that way, what made it more important to me was knowing you in the first place. I'd always liked your drawings at University, but you were always knuckling under to people. I really was glad to see you breaking out on your own. When we met the other night, you looked pretty forlorn, and I wanted you to make good. It occurred to me that I might be able to help, and in the process, give my own mundane life a novel twist'.

'What did you tell T W?'. I asked him.

'I told her I was going into seclusion for the weekend to work on a piece for a newspaper'.

'That sounds phoney'.

'I know, and she probably assumes I'm up to something. At this moment, I don't care. Is that terrible?'

'I.....er..No!' I said.

'Good, we agree'.

'Tell me' he said 'is this Rebellion business actually going ahead? Were those men really serious last night? The idea is so far-fetched'.

'Yes, they're serious. Let's not talk about it'.

Saturday zoomed past. We lolled around the garret most of the morning and I worked on the J.J. Paterson poster that afternoon, while Forbes concentrated on his newspaper piece.

About three-thirty, I came up with the bright idea of having Forbes pose as Tarzan of the Apes. I'd go out and buy some leopard-skin material. I knew which shop had exactly the stuff I wanted. On the way back, I stopped at the cafe for two hamburger's to take away. I asked the girl in the cafe if she'd seen Jack London. She told me she thought he'd gone somewhere with two men named Linus and Pete. Probably a strategy meeting, I thought, and a part of me was insulted at not being invited. I did feel relieved, though, knowing Jack London was out of the house. Whether or nor he returned that night, I don't know. My hands - and bed - were so full, that I heard none of the usual night noises.

Especially for Forbes, I made my first attempt at cooking a decent Sunday breakfast, while he worked on his article (the topic 'Chess and the working man - a Marxist view') I busily boiled water, toasted bread and poached eggs. Forbes laughed when his teeth crunched the pieces of shell that clung to his egg, but we agreed it was a good first effort. Following coffee, we got right down to business - I'd sewed a costume based roughly on a picture in my old Tarzan comic book. Imperfect as the costume was, Forbes looked terrific in it. But I couldn't decide how to pose him. I tried him in several poses - even one of him holding two pillows in a half-nelson as if they were a lion's head - but nothing worked.

He called for a break, and as he got up to go and brush his teeth, I called 'Hold that!'

He froze, looking great as Tarzan with tooth brush and tooth paste in his hands. I drew him that way.

The drawing took up most of Sunday - and by the time we had put the finishing touches to his article, he said he had to leave. I tried to coax him into staying until Monday but he explained that TW was expecting him.

'Hey, Forbes, don't you think it strange that a girl like me, could go so long - you know, looking forward to the culmination of a laborious courtship - The wedding day - when a girl can finally sleep with her boyfriend - a day I thought would never dawn.....and then suddenly here I am, in bed with you'.

'Why strange?' said Forbes. 'Did you think I was unobtainable?'

I told him that was a very egotistical thing to say!

'I don't mean it to be, but it's been without fuss - no dates - no meeting parents - no engagement - no wedding'.

But....am I prepared emotionally or intellectually?' I said.

'Did you find last night difficult?' he said.

'I didn't...no'.

'Good - Tell me. is this rebellion business actually going ahead? Were they really serious last night? The idea is a bit far-fetched! Don't get too involved'.

'I'll just give them their posters, and stay out of it' I said.

“If they let you’.

‘When am I going to see you again?’ I asked.

‘I don’t know, I have to do some serious thinking’.

‘I have to see you, especially after this Monday night thing is over’.

‘Let’s see what happens shall we?’ I felt I was saying goodbye to a soldier who was boarding his troopship....only it was me that was going into the battle!

‘I must get back’” Forbes said.

‘Yes’.

We clung to each other, but only for a few seconds. Forbes didn’t believe in lingering see-you-later.

Chapter 19.

I tried not to feel sorry for myself. I grabbed the poster and headed for Jack London’s room, hoping he’d be home by now. He wasn’t, so I went to my room to doodle and wait for him. I tried to visualise Forbes in the room but I had a difficult time recalling exactly how he looked. I checked my drawing. It was a poor version of him - too cartoon-like - and I tried to improve it - make it more clearly him. I grew quite frantic -my pencil wouldn’t do what my head commanded and my head couldn’t register a clear image of him. I heard footsteps on the stairs. Before I reached the door - it opened.

'Good - no boyfriend this time. Is the poster ready?' said Jack London.

'Here it is'.

'Tremendous. I'll take it right away. A few can be run off tonight, we have access to a printing press. You'd better stay in. Patterson wants us to stay put until he arrives'.

'Oh, all right'

'If you're nervous, perhaps Sheila could...'

'No, no' I said 'it's okay, I'll read, sketch a bit'.

'Right. I'm off'.

Jack went out again and there was nothing left for me to do but go to bed - alone.

Following yet another restless night, I slept fitfully

Monday morning, desperate for the rest that I needed to face the evening ahead.

At noon, I got up, ruined an egg. drank two cups of tea, dressed and made myself a cheese sandwich.

For something to do, I went downstairs to find Mr Fogarty. He was sitting in his kitchen, staring at a drafts board. He asked me if I wanted a cup of tea and as I didn't feel like yelling I shook my head. I sat down across the oilcloth covered table from him and played drafts with him. Sloppy moves cost me the game.

I shrugged and he laughed a laugh that became a cough which sent me to his cupboard looking for the scotch.

Once I was sure that he wasn't going to die there and then, I went upstairs to put on my coat. I wanted to go for a long walk.

'Where are you off to?' came Jack London's voice as I passed his floor.

'I'm going for a walk' I said, turning to see him leaning out of his room.

'I need some fresh air'.

'Not chickening out, are you?'

'Of course not'.

'You'd better stay in. Never know if we might need some wild brilliant poster on the spur of the moment'.

'I won't go far'.

'J.J. wants us to stay put until tonight. I think we should'.

'Oh. all right '.

"It you're nervous. I could arrange for....."

"No. no. it's all right. I'll read'.

Back in my garret, I couldn't read. I couldn't draw, and I couldn't sit. I paced the floor in circles and figure-eights until I was dizzy and had to sit down. My stomach felt ready to reject the cheese sandwich. I opened a can of Coke and left it untouched. When everything else failed, I calmed myself by drawing a rough copy of the ghostly galleon tossing on a stormy sea.

Darkness was rapidly filling in the squares of my skylight when a knock interrupted my rambling thoughts. I'd heard footsteps and was sure they belonged to a Rebel.

'Come in - door's open'. I was standing in the centre of the room, completing the job of changing clothes by zipping up my skirt, when the door opened. 'Brian!' I gasped. My first impulse was to look behind him to make sure that Jack London wasn't there. He must have heard him. 'Quick, come in'. 'Babe, I'm not sure I want to come in here, I just want to.....' 'Shhhhhhhh!' I tried to grab his hand and pull him inside but he wouldn't let me. 'What's the matter?' he asked, in a voice that seemed to resound in the stillness like a railway station announcement. I think it must have been the panic-stricken look on my face that finally coaxed him into the room. I quickly closed the door. 'You mean someone might object to my being here?' Brian asked.

'The Landlord is very strict". I said.

Brian stood there looking formidable in his shapeless raincoat, which ended just above his knees in a 1950's fashion. His collar was undone and his blue tie askew. His red face indicated that he had walked some distance in the cold, perhaps from the nearest bus stop. His face wore a frown - he seemed more puzzled than angry.

He looked young and vulnerable - his innocence made me feel unwashed, conscious of odours in the room - dirty tights, leftover food - even the lingering scent of carnal activity. I blushed. 'I know there have been men up here, Babe' Brian said, his voice jerky with the difficulty of the situation.

'Has there?' I said - with a look of innocence.

'I didn't come here to - to surprise you or anything. I just wondered how you were - how it was going'

'Brian....it's going....well, it's going...okay'.

'I was disappointed when you didn't phone or anything. I almost came over here the night after your darts game - to congratulate you - but I suppose I expected you to call me and tell me about it, especially when.....'

'I almost did telephone you. I wanted to. But I thought you'd hang up'.

'Every night I went to sleep thinking you'd phone the next day. Even kneeling beside your mother in church, I prayed for you to call me'.

I thought, when in doubt, mention the church. He'll try to make me jealous next - you see.

'Do you know who did telephone me? Only yesterday?'

I knew it. 'No, I don't Brian' I said.

'Come on, guess'.

'I can't' I said.

'Come on'.

I didn't want to guess. Nevertheless he told me.

'Sheila, your great friend. I was sure she phoned just so I'd ask her out'.

'Brian' I said 'I don't care if you ask Sheila out'.

'I see, do you think I care whether you care if I ask Sheila out? Do you, who didn't have the decency to talk over this move of yours with the person you're supposed to be engaged, think for one moment that I care whether you give your high and mighty permission for me to go out with Sheila'

He stopped talking and gave me a challenging look.

'That was some speech, Brian. Did you ask her out?'

'What business is it of yours?'

My voice grew shriller. 'Did you ask her out?'

'No' he said.

'Then, what did she call you for?' I asked him.

'She wanted to know how I was. She said she was concerned about how I was taking this whole business. She was very sweet. She said she was sure there'd be a time when you and I could sit down and talk about this - this whim of yours, and perhaps I could see why on earth anyone would want to give up a promising career in.....'

'Brian' I said "Sheila called you because it's part of the game. Don't you know that?'

'What game?'

'Brian, I'd really like to discuss life and love with you, I would, but not now'

'Good. Then why don't you ask me to take off my coat? Can't you at least be civil and offer me a cup of tea perhaps? Just because you live in squalor, it doesn't mean you can't be gracious'

'Brian, gracious as you call it, went out the window along with my past life. And would you please keep your voice down. Look, come over tomorrow and we'll chat all you want. But now, I'm afraid you're going to have to leave'.

'Ah' he said 'somebody's coming up here any minute. Is that it? Is that why you're so nervous? You're expecting that man to come back, aren't you? Where's he gone? Out for more drugs?'

'Believe me, Brian, it'd really be best for both of us if you went home and I saw you tomorrow'.

'If you're living in sin, Babe, I'd like very much to see the lucky man. I'm going to wait here for him to come back'.

Brian started to pull off his overcoat. As he started to slip the coat off, I anxiously reached for it to lift it back onto his shoulders.

'Piss off home Brian - this is my place - and if you don't leave in two seconds, I'll have you thrown out'.

'So, it's threats now, is it?'

'No, but this is my home and I have the right to tell you to Piss off.

'Language' he said.

He leaned against the wall.

'I was sitting at my desk today' he said, 'telling myself - as I struggled with the base rate - that I wasn't going to solve anything by constantly worrying about it. I decided I'd better come here after work and see you'

His voice was subdued now, much less harsh. 'I called my parents and told them I was going to a film with one of the lads from the office. I told them a lie because I knew they wouldn't want me to come over here. And I had to come over here because I couldn't stand the way we'd ended everything. Perhaps I could get to understand this whim of yours'.

'It isn't a whim! That's the whole point'.

"All right. Okay, I'll try and understand'.

'Brian you have to go'.

'Babe, if you see yourself as some kind of rebel trying to - you know what I mean - trying to rebel against.....'

'Brian, I'm not. I just want more.....more than just.....'

'What?'

'It's hard to put into words. It's just that painting means more to me than just.....'

'You're a dreamer Babe. You always were'

'Oh, I hope so Brian' I said 'I do hope so'

The door crashed open.

'What have we here? Babe! What's this man doing here and what are you telling him?'

Jack London stood bare-chested, his striped T-shirt hanging from one hand. He spread his legs in combat stance. His torso glowed with the lobster colouring of someone who has just emerged from a hot bath. His face showed angry impatience - he must have been getting pretty sick of what he thought was an endless procession of applicants for the modelling job. Brian looked scared at first, mainly because of the way Jack London had burst in. In a minute or two, he seemed to have accepted him - as a denizen of this strange room-dwellers world.

'Brian Trewin is an old friend of mine' I said. 'He dropped in to see me and was.....'

'He mentioned "Rebel" twice' said Jack, his wild hair and door-blocking pose making him resemble a professional wrestler.

'What was that all about?'

'He doesn't approve of my way of life here, that's all. He sees this new life of mine as a rebellion'.

'Sure' Jack said 'a wild crazy rebellion against society. Now that you've seen her - and her little love nest, you'd better - blow!'

Brian looked at me - then Jack London, reached for his coat but stopped short of picking it up.

'Just a minute' said Brian 'are you the landlord?'

'No he's.....'I began.

'Yes, I am' said Jack London 'and men are not allowed to visit women here after dark, so you'd better zap off, right now'.

'Is he really the landlord?' Brian asked me. He saw that I was blushing.

'Yes' I told him 'And he's right about the rules of the house'.

'I don't believe you' said Brian, placing a chair between himself and Jack London.

'I don't know what's going on, but I'm not leaving until one of you explains this'.

'I didn't cross this whole fucking country for someone like you to....'

'Jack' I said 'let me handle this. If you could leave us alone, I think I could straighten this whole thing out'.

Jack thought for a moment, pulled a wrist-watch from his trouser pocket, looked at it and said 'I'll give you exactly two minutes, if he's here after that, I'm grabbing him by the balls and throwing him into the street'.

He slammed out of the room.

'Babe, this whole business is frightening' Brian said in a hushed voice.

'Who is that man? What power does he have over you?'

'He told you he's the landlord'

'When I asked you, you said "No" and he said "Yes" - and you both acted very strangely'.

'Really' I said.

'You looked as if you were afraid of what he might do and you both kept checking the time. What's going to happen? Why do you want me out of here?'

'Brian, this is a totally different kind of.....sort of...life, that's all. This is - well, to you, I suppose it's a weird sort of life. And it's hard for you to understand. Now, you'd better.....'

'I can see you are in some kind of trouble. I've never seen you so nervous. All right, I'll go, but I'm going to get some help - a policeman perhaps, or.....'

'No Brian! There's no need. Brian, please'.

He pushed me away as he threw on his coat and made for the door.

'It's all right' he whispered 'I'll pretend to go quietly, but I'll be back with help'.

'Brian...'

I grabbed his arm as he opened the door. We both froze in shock. Jack London stood there pointing a gun at us.

Now, when I spoke about pursuing depravity, living in a garret and drawing naked men, going to bed with them, and perhaps meeting a few sleazy characters. Now, it was if someone was trying to punish me for enjoying myself too much. My fortunes had taken a cruel turn.

Guns belonged in films and comics - not in an artists studio. I had never seen a real gun before.

Chapter 20.

Suddenly, in the stillness of a winter evening in 1968, a young man in a striped T-shirt held a pistol not three feet from my chest. It was pointed more or less at Brian and me and I was terrified. For the first time, it came home to me that I was mixed up with the underworld.

'Get back into the room, both of you' said Jack London.

Brian put his hands in the air. He couldn't believe it! "Billy the Kid" had entered the saloon. Holding his hands in the air, like an outlaw in a western - his face drained of all its colour, Brian backed up. I retreated a couple of steps backwards.

'Why the gun' I said.

'Yes, said Brian 'are you sure you should be.....'

'Shut up!' he snarled. He reminded me of Jack Elam playing the baddy in about two hundred cowboy films. Yet he appeared to be as nervous as I was. He closed the door. 'We're all going to stay right here. I'm not going to let anything or anybody spoil tonight. I crossed this whole vast stinking country for this one great night. Sit down in that chair, mate, now'. Brian did as commanded.

'Excuse me' said Brian 'why.....'

'Shut the fuck up' said Jack London.

'Jack I have to go to the bathroom'. I said.

'You shut up an' all, Babe. Everyone will be here soon and we're going to wait for them. Have you got any rope?'.
.

'No' I said 'Why?'

'Use a blanket then, a towel, anything. Tie that man to that chair'.

'What?'

'Get on with it' Jack ordered.

'Now wait a minute' said Brian 'Hmm - couldn't we talk about this before....'

'NO!' Jack London barked. 'We've had all the talk and discussions and conferences we can stand. The talking is all over. We are all talked out. The young people of this city are restless, and they know it's time for action. Roll the blanket up. Babe - that's right. Now put it through the arms. Oh. wait - he'll have to take off the coat - come on - that's it. I stole daffodils from the park and threw them at the Police in Scarborough and I stole a ride in a Guard's van on good old British Rail - and I stole fruit from the new Supermarket in Portsmouth, and that kept me going until I reached Longleet and saw the grand dignified face of our gallant leader. J.J.Patterson - no not inside the Mansion - which is his rightful place, but in a photograph on the front page of the local newspaper - he was visiting the Lion enclosure at the time - got into a bit of a fix with one old Lioness. I got to meet him there and I followed him here'.

'Ah' I said.

'Yes, I crossed our wet and windy country to be here on this day of days.

Tonight I have my date with destiny and no one is going to prevent it, you hear - NO ONE!'

Jack London wiped his wet mouth with his bare forearm and inspected the tying-up job I'd done on Brian. I had used two belts to hold his ankles to the chair legs, a rolled up blanket to fix his waist to the back of the chair, and a torn sheet to tie his wrists together. He struggled a bit at first, but the gun and my gentleness made him co-operate. He looked sort of good tied to the chair that way. I was tempted to sketch him. Jack London let me sit at my table but I was too shaky to draw.

Through the skylight I could see snow beginning to fall. Jack London stood by the kitchenette, his pistol pointing at Brian and me. He was gradually winding down and there were periods of long silence. Brian wasn't gagged, Jack said he'd shoot him if he screamed out and he must've believed him.

'Jack' I said 'I have to go to the.....you know, the little girl's room'.

'Say bog, Babe - let me hear you say, bog'

'Bog' I said.

'Say the whole thing' Jack said.

'I have to go to the bog'

'Wait until the others get here'

'I can't wait, Jack. I am one of you, aren't I?' I said.

'You are not!' said Brian.

'Shut it, you. I thought you were one of us, until you let this bloke in here. On our biggest day'.

'Jack' I said 'I'm bursting'.

'So burst'.

Just then, we heard footsteps on the stairs and Jack London threw open the door.

It was J.J. Patterson, dressed in an old army greatcoat, wearing a beret and a black patch over one eye.

'Who's he? What's he doing here? Why is he tied to that chair?'

'He's a hostage' said Jack London 'He tried to persuade Babe to betray us all'.

'I did not' said Brian.

'I told you to shut it!. You are a hostage now, and hostages have to keep quiet, or they get gagged - or blown away!' said Jack London.

Two other members of the 'Rebel' group arrived. Linus and Albert, they both carried the poster IN J.J. WE TRUST. Linus seemed to be eating sweets.

'Isn't this exciting' he said.

'Linus' I said 'I am a hostage'

'Oh, are you? That's nice'.

'Not you, Babe' said Jack London - 'not you - him. You are one of us'.

As J.J. Patterson moved into the garret and deposited his coat on the bed, Jack London explained to him why Brian and I were being held.

'I won't let anyone wreck our plans' said Jack London.

'I have to go badly' I said.

'Let us do what can be done to convince these people we never designed to wrong them but what has been done was as much in their interest as our own' said J.J. Patterson.

'Isn't this exciting' said Linus.

'Shut up, Linus, eat your jelly-babies' said Jack London.

Looking flustered, but excited Sheila arrived.

'Hello, Babe. Well, Brian, how are you? Tied you up, did they? Never mind. Right, when do we start?'

J.J. Patterson sat down beside his coat. He agreed to watch Brian, while Jack London escorted me to the second floor, where I relieved some of the pressure.

Soon all the city rebels were arriving. Joe Baker came in smoking his Sherlock Holmes pipe and wearing a fedora and a fur coat. He carried a pole with a spike at the end - the kind Park Keepers use to pick up litter. Maurice Speed arrived wearing one of those glossy knee length anoraks with the peaked hood and three stripes down one arm. As he walked, you could hear the hardware clanking in his anorak pockets. I could see one of the items hanging out - a bicycle chain. Right behind him was Tom Hines, looking like a fifties Teddy-boy in his double-breasted overcoat.

He and Tom carried a load of J.J. Patterson posters and they nailed a couple to my wall.

Sam Banks arrived wearing a woollen scarf outside his coat with one end hanging in front, the other flung around his chin and neck in the student manner. When he saw me sitting at the drawing table, he grinned - his mouth just visible over the scarf, which was frosty from his breath.

'Hi, Babe' he said 'What's cooking?'

'I'm a hostage' I told him.

'I told you, you aren't' growled Jack London. 'As long as you don't do or say anything stupid again - you are one of us. After all you did the posters and you took the oath'.

'Got your weapons?' Sheila asked me.

'No - what should I take?'

'Here'.

She gave me a long knife. I looked at Brian. He was speechless. He just shook his head.

Geoff Sims came in looking back over his shoulder as if someone was following him. He looked scared. As soon as he saw Brian - he paled, but then he acknowledged J.J. Patterson by snapping to attention and saluting with the hair-trigger reflex of a zealous drill corporal.

The clatter of many feet announced the arrival of the entire political science class. They thundered up the stairs like cattle in a John Ford movie. I counted fourteen as they wedged their way into my garret. In their midst, wearing a beatific smile stood the University beauty queen.

Her clothes and hair were in such a state of disarray that I thought she must have been snogging with the whole class. She said "Hello" to Brian and sat down beside J.J. Patterson without looking at me. The students worked their way into my kitchenette and every corner of the room. Some had bought their own wine and beer and were guzzling from bottles. Others carried poles - to which two of the great unwashed nailed the posters. One of them knocked the ghostly galleon tossing on a turbulent sea onto the floor, while another poured beer over Brian's head. He cried out, prompting Jack London to take a pair of rolled up socks from my dresser and force them into his mouth. I don't know who would have heard him anyway. Mr Marriot was very deaf, and if there were other tenants, I'd never seen them, except a bloke in a kimono - who I think was a student from the art department.

In came Paul Gustav and Joe Bond. Paul was barely recognisable in a miners helmet and army surplus clothes that would have suited an African brigade more than York winter rebels. He carried a rifle with a bayonet on the end. Joe wore a naval overcoat and a ski-hat.

I'll fight to my dying breath, I won't back down to anyone in any way, shape or form' roared Paul. 'We had the devil's job finding this place' said Joe Bond.

Geoff passed out a small supply of hatchets. Jack London raised his pistol in the air and shouted -

'Three cheers for J.J. Patterson'

'Hooray' everyone yelled.

'Hip hip'

'Hooray'

'HOORAY'

'And one more'

'HOORAY'

Jack London punctuated the final cheer with a deafening shot right through one pane of the skylight - raining shattered glass and ice and snow onto some of the students and poor Brian. The shot alarmed some of us, but seconds later we were right back in the spirit of the occasion, talking, laughing and drinking.

J.J. Patterson was standing now, graciously accepting best wishes, while the beauty queen stayed seated, her eyes fixed on the hole in the skylight, watching snowflakes drop through it like ghosts, as eager student hands reached into her coat from every direction. Paul Gustav lighted a cigar and amused a few of the younger Rebels by slicing smoke rings with his bayonet. People dropped ashes and spilled beer. They tracked mud over the bed and up the walls. Bottles were thrown at the skylight and two more panes were smashed.

My garret would never be the same.

Yet somehow their high spirits were infectious.

By the time we were ready to leave, I was tearing down the girlie calendar and coming oh so close to dousing Brian with the dregs of my beer. I tipped the bottle over his head and only the sight of his wide, unbelieving eyes prevented me from pouring.

'Remember, men' Jack London said in a loud voice.

Sheila interrupted.

'And women' she said.

'Yea, and women - remember, our main weapon is the element of surprise. Before the City Council knows what hit it, we'll be in command. When we get to the Town Hall, we barge in, looking wild and disorganised, and I'll draw my trusty six-shooter on the Mayor. It'll be all over before half of you are in the building! All right, men....and ladies - let's go!'

Everyone started singing 'The Times They Are A Changing'

'Yahh-hoooooooooooo' the Rebels yelled as they clattered down the stairs.

Sheila was told to keep an eye on me and she stayed at my side as we headed out, holding the posters ahead of us like lances. Mr Marriot stood in his living-room archway, smiling and waving as if he was watching a parade. As we made our way out the front door to the lorry, I heard a bewildered voice. 'Could one of you chaps tell me if Babe lives here?'

There, standing beside the broken fence with a surprised look on his weary face, was my father. Just behind him, equally amazed was my brother.

'Hey, Dad!' I called.

'Move along, Babe, or Jack will shoot you' said Sheila, in a fierce voice that only I could hear.

'Dad, I'm sorry I can't stop now - I'm on my way out -with the lads' I was being herded along. 'Bye for now -let me know when you're coming next time'. Looking stunned, Dad and my brother took a few paces backward as they watched us board the open lorry. Jack London and J.J. Patterson climbed into the front. It was windy and snowing hard. The engine started. A few of the gang wanted to chant something and a student suggested "Old Macdonald Had A Farm". That's what we were singing as we pulled away.

We stopped about a mile away from the Town Hall. Jack London leaned out of the front cab to tell us to keep quiet. Alternately grumbling and laughing, the gang of us huddled together and watched the snow settle on each other's shoulders and on Paul's mining helmet. Joe sat in a corner with a poncho around his head - he looked like a refugee. Linus and two of the others stood together with their arms around each other - I thought they might break into a Christmas Carol at any minute. 'Rotten night' said Sheila.

The engine revved and we finally got going again. I looked up just in time to brace myself. The lorry had started off too quickly, it hit a patch of ice and rumbled toward a snowdrift. Braking didn't help. We skidded into it.

'Get out. Get out!' said Jack London. 'We'll have to push'.

We all got out and tried to push but most of us kept slipping. The drunken ones fell. Jack London grew so anxious that he yelled

'I didn't journey across the country for this!' and he ran up and down the street. One of the students went to a phone box to call for a breakdown lorry. Sheila suggested walking but the students vetoed that.

Linus tried thumbing a lift but no one would stop for a gang of rowdies carrying knives, hatchets, and banners. Finally we phoned for Taxi's, but the breakdown lorry got there first and pulled our vehicle free. Jack London paid the man and announced to us that he was going to drive.

'I hope we can get across Lendal Bridge' said Geoff with a worried frown.

'We will have to cross that bridge when we come to it, comrade' said J.J. Patterson.

'Very funny' I said.

'What?' said J.J. Patterson,.

'Cross - Bridge - joke....you made a joke' I said.

'Unintentional, I assure you' said J.J. Patterson.

Jack London drove like a madman. With visibility almost down to zero, he sent the lorry careering toward the Town Hall, flattening the snow on Lendal Bridge. We passengers were so jostled around that three of the students got sick.

I ducked my head to rub my ears on my overcoat lapel. Most of us were freezing, I caught a glimpse of one serious-looking student - blatantly warming his hand between the Beauty Queen's legs. I began to feel more and more rebellious. Onward we plunged, through the snow and the traffic lights, but we stayed on the road and we missed every parked car. At last, we slowed down and I dared to look over the top of the cab. I could make out the unique profile of the Town Hall. This was it! One of the students - whose Dad's truck it was - thanked Jack London for delivering it safely, as we all piled out.

'I crossed this country for this stupendous moment' Jack London roared.

'Let me at 'em' snarled Paul Gustav, dropping into a commando position.

'Yahhh-hoooooooooooooooooooo' the gang cheered. 'We'll hit the Council in as disorderly group as we can' said Jack London. 'Let's go'.

He and J.J. Patterson lead the way. We were at the rear of the Town Hall. Holding my knife high, I ran ahead of the pack, up there beside the leaders. 'I'm one of you' I cried. 'Look, I'm one of you!'. New energy flooded through me.

We clattered up the stone steps. Jack London opened the big door and we thundered in. I saw a little man standing in the main corridor. J.J. Patterson and Jack London ignored him and ran up to the door of the Council Chamber, which was on the second floor.

'Where you lot going then?' sighed the little man.

'They've all gone home - the Council meeting is over, I was just about to lock up!'

'Hey' said Linus 'Hey, Mr. London - Mr Patterson, they've all go off, we missed them'.

'That's right' said the little man - who I took to be the Caretaker 'they had very little on the agenda. Most of them had a cold or the flu - so they've either gone to the pub - or home to their wives and kiddies'.

I followed Jack London and J.J. Patterson through the doors into the Council Chamber.

'Where are you?' yelled Jack London. 'Come out of hiding, you Alderman pigs!'

J.J. Patterson said nothing, but, for the first time, he swung into action - he took his knife and carved "CHE LIVES" and "VIVA ZAPATA" on the Chamber door.

'All right, knock it off now, boys. This little demonstration has gone far enough'.

The three of us whirled around.

Three giant policemen bore down on us.

'This is not a demonstration' Jack London growled. 'And it is not an insurrection neither. This is a real revolution'.

We fought to get away, swinging our arms around like windmills, but they had us.

The rest of the "Rebels" were nowhere to be seen.

'Where is everybody?' said Jack London, struggling in the mammoth arms of the biggest cop.

'Our boys are rounding them up outside' said my captor.

'I didn't trek back and forth across this country to wind up in jail' protested Jack London. 'How did you know about this?'

'We got a tip-off said the Sergeant who was holding our leader.

'We didn't believe it at first - another crank call - but we had a car watching just in case. Come on, now'.

'Who called you, who?' asked Jack London.

He continued to struggle, but J.J. and I went peacefully.

'It does not matter' said J.J. Patterson with dignity, as snow melted and ran down his nose 'My work is done'.

When we got outside, a whole fleet of police cars were pulling away with Rebels inside looking sheepish and sad.

As the policemen packed the three of us into a waiting Black Maria - one cop frowned at me.

'Just a minute' he said, standing in front of me. 'Haven't I seen you somewhere before?'

'I doubt it' I said 'I wanted to be a famous artist - but I never got started'.

'I know where it was' he said 'Aren't you the little girl who won the darts trophy at the pub last week?'

'I'm not so little - but yes, it was me' I said, modestly.

'Can I have your autograph' he said.

Chapter 21

I wondered if Poets were the only artists to produce great work in prison. Perhaps if I got a long enough sentence I'd produce something worthwhile.

'You've got to go to the house first' I told the driver as the car headed for the police station.

'Which house?' the policeman beside me asked.

'Don't tell him' said Jack London.

'My house' I said. 'I mean, the house where I live -my studio'.

'Don't listen to her' Jack London snarled. 'She just wants to see her Mummy'.

'It's my boyfriend' I said 'He's tied and gagged on the top floor!'

'Where?' asked the policeman that was holding Jack London.

I blurted out the address. 'Traitor!' Jack London roared.

'We'll send a car around there later' said the driver. 'Now we have to get you lot into the cells'

Reclining in my Police Cell, I thought how nice it was to be warm as I listened to a bearded old inmate along the corridor sing "Danny Boy".

On Tuesday morning, I was visited by a lawyer, one I wasn't very thrilled to see.

'Well' he said 'here she is - public enemy number one! Disc-jockeying not work out then?'

'I wasn't.....never mind. I wanted to be an artist -painting, you know' I said.

'Nice little cell you have here. Your artistic career has certainly taken you a long way from home'

'Mr Hayes?' I said.

'That's it. Your Dad talked me into giving you that job, remember? I've come to represent you' he said.

'I need that, do I?'

'Well, it's not exactly "Bonnie and Clyde" but you do, yes'.

'I see' I said.

'Smashing up the Town Hall is the sort of behaviour we should expect from a budding artist, I suppose. Funny that we heard nothing about it on the B.B.C. Ha! Ha!

Mind you, it is an ugly building - you ought to have done the job properly, and burnt it down! Might earn you the gratitude of the local citizenry'

'Sorry' I said 'I'm not in the mood for comedy. I've got a head-ache from all the excitement. Did they find Brian? He was tied up and gagged - in the attic'

'Not to worry. He was released. Said you were forced to join the gang at gun-point. Were you?'

'Sort of' I told him.

'Yes, well. The Caretaker told us you seemed rather reluctant to join in the vandalism'.

'So, when do I get out?'

'No so fast, young woman. They'll let you out. But only if I make you promise to move back with your parents. Mind you, I can't take you back into the firm.

Wouldn't do to have a criminal under our roof, would it? Ha! Ha!'

'No' I said 'I suppose not. What about the others? Will they be charged?'

'Shouldn't think so. It was a bit of excitement on a dull evening'.

Leaving jail in the company of Mr. Hayes was anything but the happiest of events.

The last person I wanted a kindness from was my ex-boss. He kept up a steady patter while he drove me over to Mr. Marriot's. I wanted him to leave me there, but he insisted he could only vouch for me if I went home. He said he'd help me pack. I agreed, mainly because I thought I could always move back after the fuss had died down, though I didn't tell Mr. Hayes that. In the end, it was a good idea to have him with me. He was so incongruous in the garret surroundings that all my fond memories were obliterated. That room looked like a battered and abandoned greenhouse. Besides the mess the Rebels had made and the remnants of Brian's bondage, there was melting snow over everything - it had come in through the broken skylight. I shoved my soggy drawing paper into my suitcase.

On the way out, I called 'Goodbye' to Mr Marriot - I found him in his kitchen, examining a Scotch label with a magnifying glass - and I was in Mr Hayes's Singer Vogue Estate with all my stuff in the boot when I remembered something. 'Just a minute' I said.

I ran back upstairs and went straight to the kitchenette. I reached behind the old fridge and from the greasy dirt and cobwebs I pulled out my trophy. It had survived the rebellion.

'What is that?' said Mr Hayes.

'It's my Oscar' I answered 'I won it for my dazzling performance as an anarchist artist'

My Hayes didn't laugh!

Chapter 22.

You could say that was the end of my artistic career. I think of it now all these years later, as if it were a dream. No "Wild Bunch" me. I Kerouac'd my way home. Never to be "On The Road" or a "Dharma Bum". But I have to think of it as a real adventure, the kind you can brag about when you are old and grey. Back to my parents house I went and, in a day or two, it seemed as if I'd never left. They put no pressure on me to go out and get another job because they were happy to have me back. 'She's come to her senses' I heard my mother say. I sat on my bed and just stared at the wall.

Occasionally I looked at a newspaper, and one day I read that both Jack London and J.J. Patterson were sent to an open prison for three months, while the rest of the "Rebels" were set free.

I sometimes thought that Jack London might come looking for me when he got out, but he never did. According to Linus, J J Patterson and Jack London were on their way to America to start a independent record company!

One night in the Transport Cafe, Linus said they didn't see Sheila anymore. The mention of her name made me angry. A few nights later, I drank a few glasses of wine and that made me belligerent and I phoned Sheila.

'It was all your fault I got mixed up with J.J. Patterson' I told her. 'I'm coming over there to pull all your hair out!'

'Piss off' Sheila said.

'Sheila' I said 'you were never very good at cursing, swear words lose their punch when you say them'

I slammed down the telephone.

Later, I heard Sheila took a teacher training course - and teaches Infants in Wigan, which might account for the attitude of so many kids these days.

I like to think that my brush with the Rebels made me more aggressive. I jumped out of bed one morning and informed my parents that I was off into town - and that I wouldn't be back until I'd found a job. After a brisk walk along Monkgate, feeling I belonged among all the young-women-in-a-hurry - I marched into the Labour Exchange, determined to fight my way back up the legal ladder. They told me there was a vacancy at a new firm called Freistadt, Campbell and Dench.

They phoned to make an appointment for me with the office manager, Miss Griffiths.

I like to think that it was my new found aggressiveness that impressed Miss Griffiths and led her to offer me a trainee position.

I don't know what happened to my new aggressiveness when it came to Bill Forbes. On the other hand, hadn't he shown a reasonable amount of affection for me? But what about Brian? More guilt.

One night, when I could stand inactivity no longer, I walked past Forbes's house, when after minutes of soul-searching, I thought better of it - I found a phone box and dialled Forbes's number.

A man's voice. Was it Forbes? I was sure it was. I hung up without saying a word.

Well, you know how you can put things off. There never seemed to be another appropriate moment. And why didn't he phone me? With characteristic masochism, I started watching the wedding announcements in our local paper - and yes, sure enough, with spring came this - "Mr and Mrs James Wood are pleased to announce the engagement of their daughter, Tina Wood to Mr William Forbes, only son of Mr and Mrs Conrad Forbes. The wedding will take place at two-thirty p.m. on the 1st of May at St. Cuthbert Church" How could he? What could he see in her? Why hadn't he given me a chance?

Should I call T W and tell her all about Forbes and me? Perhaps I'd send her the sketch I'd done of her beloved as a wedding present! I didn't. I sent an electric kettle. For over two months I didn't phone Brian - and he didn't phone me. But after seeing him looking at me over his prayer-book in Church one Sunday, I thought I did owe him something - after all he was generous and considerate. So, I phoned him and asked if he'd like to go to the flicks. He said he'd love to. After the film he took my hand.

'You will be a virgin when we get married, Babe? You know how my mother and I feel about you wearing white if you're not...not...you know...'

'Intact?' I said.

"All right. Babe' he said 'I'm glad you've had some experience. I really am. I think it's important that....well...one of us has, but you know how I feel about wearing white if you're not.....'

'Brian" I said "Do you mean.....you've never....?'

'Er.....well....once'

'Anyone I know?' I asked him.

'I don't think I should tell you'

'Come on Brian, you know all about me and.....'

'Forbes, you mean? Don't you?'

'Yes' I said 'Who was it?'

'Sheila' he said.

'WHAT!! WHEN!!'

'That night. She came back. Untied

me....and.....well.....talking.....it sort of.....got....you know.....'

'Yes, Brian' I said 'I know - Sheila, the good time that was had by all'. We both laughed.

What could I do. We made wedding plans. Three months later we were married.

The agreement that we wanted marriage overrode whatever disappointment we had, and this would be the nature of the compromise for the rest of our lives.

And in time, when desire had waned, time would soften our disappointment as it would harden our arteries and make brittle our hair and nails and bones. A

marriage? Of course - a happy one? - well, why not -within it's limits. An idyllic

marriage? Not likely, but then so many weren't - and the lies of the wedding anniversaries were small ones in the face of the overwhelming reality of lives

lived together for so many years. Longevity brought its own excuses, its own blurring sentiments, its own sensible effacement of past disappointments. Time

did not merely heal wounds, it shrank them to points of invisibility and age

washed out the taste for recalling them. I did wear white - my parents insisted.

Later, the local newspaper asked me to write a column on Painting Tips. It ran for a year, complete with sketches - how to mix paints - hold the brush - that sort of thing.

I think it helped some people - though Brian claims his work-mates found my column humorous, rather than helpful.

I had hoped my daughter would be the serious artist in the family - but Brian has her spending all her time -Ballroom Dancing! Preparing her for competition. I still paint, but only at weekends, and mainly to amuse the children. And Brian made me promise never to tell them about the garret and my time as an artist and rebel - he says it might give them ideas. There is a tyranny of good intentions, and it is its very benevolence which makes rebellion impossible -compromise? Indeed, but how far? How much? For how long? No one wants to be left out in the cold - it's cold out there, so cold that you have to run off and find some other warmth, the comfort of belonging to a society, even one composed of people like Brian. I think God should have given us two lives - one to gain experience - and the other to put the experience to use - but the consequences would have probably baffled him.

The End

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